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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



YOU WILL REMAIN HERE UNTIL SUCH TIME AS YOU CONSENT TO BECOME MY WIFE," SAID HORACE FIELDING, THREATENING

A STRANGE DISSAPPEARANCE

NOVELETTE.
(CONCLUDED.)

I PRESUME, madam, that you consider me in duty bound to make some provision for this niece of mine, at present in your employ!" Joshua Vernon began, with white hair standing erect and bristling with contradictoriness. "At least, I inferred as much from our conversation of yesterday!"

"Pray be seated, Mr. Vernon," said the widow, in her low, pleasant voice. "Since then I have had time to think the matter

over thoroughly. Perhaps, being somewhat impulsive, I allowed my liking for your niece to influence me unduly in urging her claim upon you. I am quite willing to admit now that you are not under any obligation to provide for her. She is young and well-educated, quite able to earn her own living."

Joshua Vernon gave an astonished grunt; this was not at all what he had reckoned on.

"I have not encouraged Madeline in the idea that you intend doing anything for her," Mrs. Falconer went on. "She is very happy here as my companion, and you cannot reasonably be expected to maintain her."

"Humph! I trust, madam, that I am in a position to assist the only remaining member of my family if I think proper to do so," he said, irritably. "As you remarked just now, I am not compelled to provide my brother's child with a home. Nevertheless, I intend

doing so, in order to rescue her from her present position, although I detest girls, and never expected to be pestered with any of them about me. Pity she's too old to be sent to school again!"

Joshua Vernon had come anticipating expostulations, arguments, entreaties, and a niece only too ready and willing to throw herself into his reluctant arms. He found, instead, a lady by no means anxious to press that niece's claims, while the girl herself was nowhere to be seen.

Mrs. Falconer's clever policy was fast producing the desired result. His contradictory nature, upon being humoured, took another turn.

Joshua Vernon hated anyone to agree with him. He was miserable if people entered into a conspiracy not to contradict him, to give him his way without opposition. Mrs.

Falconer's tone was so unexpected that it induced him to adopt his niece's cause.

"It is very generous on your part," said the widow, with a quiet smile, "but really I fail to see why you should inconvenience yourself, and accept so much responsibility in order to benefit Madeline. She is a good girl, as girls go, and at present she has no unreasonable expectations to unsettle her. Why not allow her to remain with me? She has a fair share of change and society as my companion, and what more can a girl possibly want?"

"A home of her own, madam!" retorted Joshua Vernon, waxing hot as the other grew cool. "Until now no Vernon has ever occupied a dependent position. Had I been aware of my niece's circumstances earlier in the day I should have taken measures to improve them. As it is, for the credit of the family, her maintenance will devolve upon me until such time as she marries, which I sincerely hope she will do at an early date."

"It is too amusing," thought Mrs. Falconer, deftly sorting her many-coloured silks. "Like the Irishman's pig, you have only to drive him in one direction when you want him to take another, and the thing is done!"

"My niece's services are of value to her, and doubtless underpaid," reflected Joshua Vernon, sitting opposite to the calm, elegant, high-bred woman, with his head a little on one side, a single eyeglass screwed into his small, fiery, grey eye. "Mrs. Falconer doesn't wish to be at the trouble and expense of engaging another companion. I can read her easily enough, but I am not to be turned from my purpose by a few soft words. Oh, dear, no! She would like to retain my niece, and that is precisely what she shall not do."

"I expected to see my niece," he said, aloud. "I hope she is not from home?"

"Oh, dear, no," was the reply, betokening but languid interest. "She is upstairs, I believe, altering a dress for me. I will send for her—if you really wish to see her."

"Really wish to see her!" The eyeglass became quite ferocious. "Why, why, confound it, madam! Did I not come here to-day for that purpose alone? And I understood that Madeline was your companion, not your lady's-maid!"

"Miss Vernon is my companion, but sometimes, when my maid is unusually busy, she is kind enough to assist her," explained Mrs. Falconer.

"Indeed; well, she will have a maid of her own very shortly. I intend to take a small house in Mayfair, and instal my niece in it as mistress." He had come to Mrs. Falconer's without any definite intentions respecting Madeline. The house in Mayfair was an afterthought. "Perhaps you will allow your servant to inform her that I am here?"

"Certainly!"

Mrs. Falconer rang the bell, and gave the footman his instructions.

"I shall be very sorry to lose Miss Vernon," she added, petulantly, "just as she has grown accustomed to my ways, and almost indispensable to me."

"I daresay you will, madam; I daresay you will," growled Joshua Vernon, inwardly complimenting himself upon his own astuteness in reading her selfish motives. "Fortunately, companions are plentiful, and my niece's prospects render it unnecessary for her to fulfil such duties any longer."

"Come and give me a kiss, my dear!" he said, after subjecting Madeline to a severe scrutiny, as she glided timidly into the room. "You were but a child when I last saw you. You resemble your father—my eldest brother. Don't be afraid of me. I mean to get kindly to you. I should not have quarrelled with your father if he had been less confidently dogmatic, and fond of having his own way in everything. I never knew a man so fond of contradicting other people. It's a bad habit—very bad habit; but since he's dead and gone, why, I forgive him. To prove that my forgiveness is genuine I'm going to adopt you.

This lady tells me that you have been happy here with her!"

"Very happy indeed, Uncle Joshua," said Madeline, gratefully.

"Well, you ought to be quite as happy with me, and so you will. Now go and put on your things at once. From henceforth you belong to me, Madeline. I'm staying at an hotel now, but we'll begin our house-hunting to-morrow, my dear, to-morrow, and you shall be my housekeeper."

"But, Uncle Joshua," expostulated the girl gently, "while sensible of your kindness, I cannot leave Mrs. Falconer at a moment's notice. She has been, she is, such a real friend to me that I should be ungrateful were I to desert her in this summary fashion."

"Pray do not leave me companionless, Mr. Vernon," said the widow, laughingly, "or I shall regret ever having met you. Let me have Madeline for just one week longer—as a visitor. Then I will give her up to you, without any protest. I hope you will consent to dine with us to-night, while Madeline will, of course, be at liberty to go house-hunting with you to-morrow."

Joshua Vernon actually assented to this suggestion. His niece's beauty, her gentle pleasing manner, had softened the old man, and predisposed him in her favour.

Yes, he was glad already—by Jove he was!—that he had encountered Madeline and got the best of that artful woman, Mrs. Falconer, a selfish, designing creature, who would have stood in the girl's light had it been possible.

Their visitor gone, Mrs. Falconer proceeded to describe her method in dealing with him, to Madeline's mingled amusement and dismay.

"He is very hasty and choleric," said the latter, dubiously. "I don't know how we shall get on together. He looks as if he could box my ears were I ever to contradict him. You have done all this to advance my interest, yet I would far rather have remained with you."

"Your uncle will improve upon acquaintance," replied the other, confidently. "You will learn to like him, in spite of his peculiarities. Sorry as I shall be to lose you, I am anxious to see you well provided for, child. Now you will have a warm, safe nest of your own!"

Joshua Vernon dined with the two ladies that night, triumphantly proving them to be in the wrong whenever they ventured upon an opinion.

The next day he commenced house-hunting with his accustomed energy. Mrs. Falconer being pressed into the service.

A bijou residence in Mayfair was selected as his future residence and that of Madeline. He consulted his niece's taste when the furnishing of it was in question, merely stipulating that it should not be sufficiently æsthetic to preclude all comfort.

"I hate straight-backed chairs and drawing-rooms crammed full of crockery that ought to be in the kitchen," he remarked, vigorously. "Do as you like respecting your own rooms, little girl, but let mine be rationally furnished, since I am too old to adapt myself to the fashion of the day."

As Mrs. Falconer had predicted, Joshua Vernon improved upon acquaintance. Madeline began to experience something like affection for the eccentric, kind-hearted old man. Little as she was influenced by sordid considerations, she could but feel the happier for being thus installed in a luxurious home of her own.

"Uncle Joshua, you are doing your best to spoil me with so much indulgence," she protested, when, on taking possession of her new home, he handed her the keys with a funny little formal speech that made her laugh, while something in it, she knew not what, brought the unbidden tears to her eyes. "I hope I shall not abuse so much authority. I will certainly do my utmost to please and satisfy you. We are such a lonely pair," she continued, "that we ought to care a great deal for each other."

"So we shall," replied Uncle Joshua, briskly. "I knew that you would suit me, child, from the first moment I saw you, which was fortunate, considering that I had decided to take you away from Mrs. Falconer, whatever you might be like in person or disposition, as soon as I discovered how anxious she was to retain you. She is a nice woman, a very nice woman, but selfish, selfish, like the rest of us when it comes to the point!"

And he retained this opinion of the charming, graceful widow to his dying day.

Joshua Vernon had, of course, been made aware of Gervase Talbot's strange disappearance, and its effect upon Madeline. The story, as related by Mrs. Falconer, interested him greatly.

Although Gervase was personally unknown to him yet, as Madeline's lover, his possible fate aroused the old man's liveliest sympathy. He was secretly vexed to think that Mrs. Falconer had been first in the field with regard to the detectives employed to trace Gervase. This did not prevent him, however, from securing the ablest detective skill himself and offering a large reward for any information bearing upon the artist's disappearance.

Madeline had at least the satisfaction of knowing that no stone had been left unturned in the attempt to solve the missing man's fate. Yet the double search, carefully conducted as it was, proved unavailing. No facts were elicited.

Had Gervase Talbot melted into space that night by the river-side he could not have vanished more completely, leaving no trace behind, not so much as the ghost of a "clue."

To Horace Fielding, always more or less impecunious, and over head and ears in debt, Madeline Vernon's adoption by her wealthy uncle came as a very welcome piece of news. He had long looked forward to recouping his shattered fortunes, the result of extravagance; by means of a marriage with an heiress. He could afford now to woo Madeline in earnest, not merely in order to gratify a passion strong as it was selfish.

Madeline's heiress-ship would render her a desirable wife. To marry the girl he loved, while her ample fortune went to swell his finances, would be a consummation scarcely capable of being improved upon.

She could not really dislike him, he reflected. It would be unjust to ascribe such bad taste to such a charming girl. Her coldness and hauteur were probably assumed to hide a warmer feeling. And, even if the dislike were genuine on her part, had he not sufficient individuality, volition, and knowledge of the female character to overcome it by degrees, and win Madeline's love?

"I wonder how much the old man is worth?" he mused, on his way home from Mrs. Falconer's, where he had learnt the details concerning Madeline's fortune. "I really ought not to let myself go under forty thousand—I should be cheap at that!"

Which shows what varying estimates men and women may arrive in reference to their own value.

As frequently as possible Horace Fielding affected Joshua Vernon's society. He wanted to ingratiate himself with the old man, to win his good opinion. To this end he hithertoed his weak points and foibles, while his own extensive knowledge of America—whither he had once repaired, according to the uncharitable, to escape his creditors and seek peaceful oblivion—served as a link, a common sympathy, between the two men.

Madeline noted, with regret, her uncle's increased partiality for Horace Fielding, whom in her secret heart she both disliked and despised. It was not all progress for him, though. If he advanced one step in Joshua Vernon's good graces, he fell back two in those of his niece.

CHAPTER VIII.

Taking up the paper one morning, Madeline's eyes were attracted by a paragraph headed, "Discovery of Stone at Ingham."

Park." She read it through with breathless interest, a dull pain at her heart the while.

The present owner, Mr. Percy Dennison, the paper went on to say, had long been of opinion that a valuable stone quarry existed beneath the proverbially poor unproductive soil of Inglefield Park. This opinion had been endorsed by a practical man acquainted with the subject. He had then commenced operations with the most satisfactory results. The stone was discovered not far below the surface, and it appeared to extend for some considerable distance. It was of a kind much in request for public and other buildings—strong, handsome, durable. Mr. Dennison was to be congratulated upon such a find, which must need increase the value of his estate to an enormous extent, especially if the vein proved to be a large one. He was in a position now to obtain something beyond bread from a stone, and to rebuild Inglefield House, a very dilapidated mansion according to all accounts, at small expense.

The paper slipped from Madeline's hand as she sat there thinking intently over what she had just read, trying to connect it with Gervase Talbot's fate.

Had Percy Dennison, she wondered, anticipated the discovery of this stone quarry, which was to make him a wealthy man, previous to Gerald's disappearance, or had the idea of its existence only dawned upon him later on? If she could but know. As it was, her vague suspicions, her dislike for Percy Dennison, were augmented by this news. Instead of succeeding to a worthless property, Gervase had had a fortune in his grasp without being aware of it, however. His cousin, as her presumptive, with some inkling of the truth, would naturally regard Gervase as a man much to be envied. Had he gone beyond this in attempting to dispose of him that Inglefield Park might change owners? Was Percy Dennison capable of committing a crime in order to gain his own ends?

Madeline could not answer this torturing question. She took Uncle Joshua and Mrs. Falconer into her confidence, however, and the irascible, impulsive old gentleman announced his intention of going down to Inglefield as his niece's representative; ostensibly to inquire if any tidings of Gervase Talbot had been elicited, in reality to make Percy Dennison's acquaintance and diagnose his character, in so far as he was able.

Percy Dennison received his unexpected visitor very affably. He regretted to say that he was still quite in the dark respecting his cousin's fate, although he had spared no pains in the endeavour to ascertain it.

Meanwhile, the management of the estate, and the recently discovered stone quarry, devolved upon him, as a trust which he should be only too glad to renounce in the event of Gervase Talbot's reappearance.

"Assuming Mr. Talbot to be dead, the property becomes yours, I believe," said Uncle Joshua, eyeing the barrister keenly.

"Let us hope the contingency is a very remote one," rejoined Percy, deprecatingly. "In the absence of any definite tidings, any actual proof of his death, I should not feel justified in assuming the ownership, not at least until several years had elapsed. Until then I shall regard the estate and revenues as his, to be accounted for should he return. I am only a *locum tenens*!"

"All very fine," reflected Uncle Joshua, when in the train on his way home; "yet, in spite of your smooth, plausible manner, Mr. Dennison, I neither like nor trust you. The handling of Gervase Talbot's gold is a pleasant and more remunerative task for you than the study of briefs at three or four guineas a-piece. I believe you to be capable of any dirty work when money is in question. How to get at you, that is the thing—to reach you through your polite reserve. You wear an armour of chain mail, very pliant and flexible, but too close-fitting to admit of a sharp thrust reaching you through it. I would freely give a thousand pounds to have this

mystery cleared up, since it darkens my little girl's life, and poisons all her happiness. What the deuce did she want to fall in love with that painter fellow for, I wonder?"

Someone else read of that discovery at Inglefield with quickened pulse.

Gladys Fielding, now Lady Roscoe, felt a curious blending of pain and regret thrill through her on becoming aware of the source of wealth Gervase Talbot would have enjoyed but for his strange, abrupt disappearance.

If things had only fallen out differently, if that discovery had only taken place earlier in the day, she would have consented to forego a title, and become the wife of the man she loved, thus altering the tenor of his life, and perhaps averting such a fate as the one that had befallen him.

Now he was lost to her, and to the good fortune that had come too late to benefit either of them. As long as she lived Gladys would never cease to love or regret Gervase Talbot. He had made a deep impression upon her, selfish and worldly as she was.

In all probability he was dead, the victim of some remorseless crime, she reflected miserably, and, even if she were to return now, it would only be to shower reproaches upon her for having proved so faithless to him. The "might have been" was exceedingly bitter to the proud, beautiful woman just then. One thing troubled her especially. She had never felt quite certain of Gervase Talbot's love.

Many a time during their acquaintance he had suffered a relapse into moodiness and gloom, as if his heart were elsewhere, in spite of the mad infatuation that swayed him, and rendered him for the time being her slave. Some chance word, some bitter speech savouring of regret or self-reproach, had frequently caused her to doubt her actual supremacy over him, to wonder if a more favoured woman, one whom he had previously loved, still occupied his thoughts and prevented him from becoming wholly hers.

He might be dead, yet it would have consoled her immensely to know that she, and she alone, had held the first place in his heart.

Gladys, Lady Roscoe, fulfilled Percy Dennison's prophecy by making inquiries about the picture for which she herself had sat in the character of Helen. Gervase Talbot had declared he would never sell it. Now that he had vanished so mysteriously she was desirous of becoming its possessor; it seemed to belong exclusively to her and to him.

Percy Dennison graciously allowed her to purchase it for a large sum of money, which went into his own pocket.

Gladys had the picture hung in her private sitting-room. It gave rise to painful memories, and pain to a woman of her calibre was, as a rule, a thing to be shunned and avoided; yet, for the artist's sake, his work occupied the place of honour, where her eyes could rest upon it twenty times a day.

Lady Roscoe was not a very happy being, although the highest summit of her ambition had been realised. A sense of something wanting in her life, of some higher, purer delight and ineffable tenderness just missed haunted her perpetually.

Lord Roscoe, too, was not the most desirable of husbands, from a domestic point of view. His temper was uncertain, and he loved to exercise a kind of petty tyranny over his beautiful young wife, of whom he was inordinately jealous; to fetter and curb her actions, interfere with her engagements, and limit her expenditure in a manner that tried her patience sorely.

She strove, in her grand, imperious, queenly fashion, to ignore his exigencies, to assert her own individuality, and live her own life as much as possible independent of his.

Yet Lord Roscoe was not easily to be set down. He stung and irritated her like a gadfly; he buzzed around her with persistent, unwelcome attentions and admonitions, while

she could not enjoy the satisfaction of crushing him, as she would have done the gadfly.

Lady Roscoe had her box at the opera, her town and country house, her splendid equipage, and elaborate toilettes, that helped to set the fashion for less distinguished people. The famous Roscoe diamonds gleamed and sparkled upon her white neck and arms on state occasions, giving rise to a terrible amount of feminine envy.

She was well received in the best and most exclusive circles, yet there was an absence of love and tenderness in her life, an aching void which wealth, and rank, and gratified ambition could never fill.

Once, shortly after that discovery at Inglefield Park, as she emerged from a large millinery establishment in Regent Street, and was about to enter her carriage, she caught sight of a passing face in the crowd.

Was it a dream face, a phantom belonging to that sad beautiful past, bringing it swiftly back to her memory? She could not tell. She only knew that changed, worn, haggard as they were, the features resembled those of Gervase Talbot. The look of reproach in the large sunken eyes, as they met hers in silent recognition for a brief second, seemed fairly to scorch her. Then, as swiftly as it had dawned upon her, the face vanished amidst the throng.

To the astonishment of her superb coachman and footman, Lady Roscoe went hurriedly down the crowded street for a few yards, as if in search of something or some one. Then, recognising the fatality of the attempt to discover the owner of that face, she retraced her steps, entered her carriage, and gave the word "Home!" She refused to see any callers that day, and absolved herself from a dinner party to which she had been invited, on the score of a bad headache.

Meanwhile, Madeline Vernon, in addition to the sorrow which her lover's disappearance had entailed upon her, was encountering fresh trouble and perplexity in connection with Horace Fielding.

That gentleman, although he did not exactly persecute her with his attentions, yet contrived to make them sufficiently obvious. In a thousand different ways he urged his suit delicately upon her, refusing to recognise various symptoms of dislike and disapproval, which she did not fail to manifest.

Joshua Vernon's friendly attitude tended to encourage the young man in his wooing—to predict a favourable termination to it. Madeline would not surely venture to cross her uncle's wishes when it came to the point, however much they might differ from her own, seeing that her future prospects were so entirely dependent upon him! Accordingly, Horace Fielding played up to Uncle Joshua, and gained a yet firmer hold in his favour, while sedulously courting Madeline.

She regarded the situation with growing alarm and uneasiness. Uncle Joshua was always singing Horace Fielding's praises, while remaining obstinately blind to his faults.

"He's a shrewd, clever fellow, well-bred, too, with plenty of nous; not one of those limp, long-legged creatures who hang around drawing-room doors, and lean up against walls at parties, looking as if they had been boned—all ready for cooking," he remarked, in answer to some speech of Madeline's. "I can't imagine why you dislike him, my dear, a well set-up, handsome man, with good connections and extensive knowledge of the world. What if he has been somewhat wild and extravagant? I've heard that those men, when they ranger themselves, makes the best of husbands. Nothing dishonourable has ever been brought against him, and he stands high in my estimation. I don't wish to be unkind, Madeline, but the sooner you try to forget Mr. Talbot the better. He must not be allowed to spoil your life, child—to prevent you from loving again, and more happily this time, I trust."

Madeline made no reply to the speech. She could not open her uncle's eyes to Horace Fielding's true character, as she herself divided it, and she hated to vex or cross him in any way. Until such time as he requested her to marry Fielding she would be patient. Then she knew well what her answer must be.

Desirous of advancing his cause and enlisting fresh aid, Horace Fielding had persuaded his sister to take Madeline up and cultivate her society. Without feeling strongly attracted towards the brilliant, imperious, beautiful woman, Madeline thought Lady Roscoe a decided improvement upon her brother, and to some extent reciprocated the friendly overtures made.

"What a splendid picture!" she exclaimed, admiringly, when, admitted for the first time to her ladyship's private sitting-room, a privileged visitor, her eyes rested upon Gervase Talbot's masterpiece. "The colouring is so rich and deep, the face so perfect. Why, Lady Roscoe," glancing swiftly at her, "Helen's lovely face and yours are identical. The artist has caught your habitual expression in the happiest manner!"

Gladys smiled languidly.

"There is a history connected with that picture," she replied. "The artist was in despair, failing to discover a model that approached his ideal of Helen of Troy. I consented—at his urgent request—to give him three sittings, since he was pleased to approve of my face. When finished he expressed his intention of keeping the picture, which he regarded as his masterpiece, instead of selling it. After his disappearance—he vanished in a most mysterious manner—I traced the 'Helen' and purchased it for the sake of auld lang syne."

"And the artist's name?" cried Madeline, breathlessly.

"Was Gervase Talbot."

"I knew it," said the girl, with a little flush born of excitement rising to the pure pale face. "At least, I thought I could recognise his style—it is so familiar to me."

"You were acquainted with Mr. Talbot, then?" remarked Gladys, her tone evincing some surprise.

"We were more than acquaintances," said Madeline quietly. "At the time of his disappearance, Mr. Talbot and I were engaged to be married."

Woman of the world as she was, skilled in the art of concealing her emotions, Gladys could not suppress a start as these words fell upon her ear.

Hers had been but a partial triumph, then, after all, and she could not tell to what extent she had succeeded in shaking Gervase Talbot's allegiance to his fiancée. She felt almost inclined to hate this girl who had won his first love, who had actually been betrothed to him. Yet she, Gladys, had certainly carried him off his balance and evoked a fierce, strong, passionate attachment. Those words of his, "You have cost me far more than you are aware of," recurred to her now. Had he spoken them in allusion to Madeline Vernon and his engagement?

"How sad for you?" she said, calmly, after a brief pause. "And you have not the least idea of what became of your lover?"

Madeline shook her head.

"None whatever. There are times when I think, I fear, he must have been murdered. I received a letter from him only a week previous to his disappearance, and there was no allusion in it to any trouble or debt oppressing him. He wrote in his usual style. It is a profound mystery."

Evidently she suspected nothing. Her faith in the missing man was unshaken. Gladys decided to let it remain so. She was never purposely cruel, save when her own interests were at stake. Since Gervase Talbot was dead, Madeline's love for him mattered little. That face which had startled her so in Regent Street could have been only a chance likeness, her own conscience supplying the reproachful look in the eyes.

"He was very dear to you!" she said, interrogatively.

"So dear," rejoined Madeline, "that I shall remain faithful to his memory as long as I live!"

In spite of his sister's warning to proceed cautiously and with tact in the attempt to win Madeline, Horace Fielding was becoming very impatient. He thought there had been enough and too much of indefinite courtship, with creditors growing clamorous and debts accumulating every day; and he secretly determined to put his fate to the test at the earliest opportunity.

That took the shape of Mrs. Cimabue Brown's ball. Joshua Vernon and his niece were among those present, Madeline looking exquisitely fair and graceful in clouds of white tulle, with "wreathed pearls" confining her soft, dark hair, and a bunch of snowy roses clustering amidst the lace upon her bosom.

"She was very lovely!" Horace Fielding told himself, with a satisfied air. "A deuced fine girl!" whom he had set his heart upon marrying, since the lovely face would have a golden frame.

With Madeline as his wife, the wheels of life would revolve smoothly again. Old Vernon couldn't go on living for ever; and as to that painter-fellow, to whom she had once been engaged, surely he, Horace Fielding, could find means to efface his image from her memory, and grave his own there instead!

Madeline could not well avoid giving him one dance, since he pleaded so hard, and strove to make the most of it; yet he found it uphill work, talking soft nonsense to her. Her wonted ready repartee had failed her for once, and she was both too proud and too gentle to indulge in flirtation, to trifle with his or any other man's heart.

The dance over, he led her, a somewhat unwilling companion, into the conservatory, radiant with soft, tempered light, fairy lamps gleaming here and there amidst the foliage.

"Madeline," he said, gently, seating himself beside her. "I have a confession to make. I love you, and I want you to give yourself to me—to become my wife!"

CHAPTER IX.

Madeline started perceptibly. Her lips took a firmer curve.

"Mr. Fielding," she replied, without any hesitation. "What you ask for is impossible. I do not care for you in that way, and there are other reasons also. We can never be more to each other than we are at present."

His brow lowered at this frank repulse, yet he evinced no other sign of defeat or discomfiture.

"I could make you happy, Madeline. I could teach you to love me!" he persisted. "Will you tell me what those other reasons consist of?"

"You have doubtless heard of my engagement to Mr. Talbot?" said Madeline, striving to speak calmly.

"Yes! but he has been dead some time, or at least that is the general opinion. You cannot mean to devote yourself to a memory, to close your heart against all love but his?" urged Horace Fielding. "Only give me a little hope, and I will not be exigent in my demands."

"Were I to do so I should only be deceiving you!" was the reply. "Dead or alive, Gervase Talbot will remain my lover. No one else can take his place. To be candid, Mr. Fielding, my decision with regard to him does not affect you. Had I failed to meet Gervase Talbot I should still have refused to become your wife."

Horace Fielding's light blue eyes had a steely gleam in them. Thwarted love and the prospect of losing Madeline's fortune were playing the deuce with his temper.

"You are, indeed, candid!" he exclaimed,

with a bitter laugh. "Well, that which is hard to win is always more valued when won, and I shall not despair."

"Why put yourself to needless pain? I shall never have any other answer to give you. I am not one lightly to change my mind, or to love more than once."

"I cannot accept your answer as final," said Horace Fielding, doggedly. "Sooner or later love like mine must command love in response. I can wait, Madeline, and I am a persistent wooer. I allow no obstacles to discourage me!"

"In other words, you intend to continue this unmanly persecution, notwithstanding my absolute refusal to entertain your proposal of marriage," said the girl, proudly and indignantly. "It will not tend to increase my liking for you, which was never at any time very strong!"

"I could not be guilty of persecuting you," he rejoined; "yet to abandon all hope of eventually inducing you to become my wife is—quite impossible. You will not always entertain such an unfavourable opinion of me. You must, you will, in time learn to appreciate the love I am so eager to lavish upon you."

"I can only repeat that your hopes are groundless," said Madeline, haughtily. "I wish to return to the ball-room!"

"Your uncle, Mr. Vernon, is not averse to my suit," he replied, disregarding her request. "Indeed, he is willing to further it. Are you prepared—in addition to your cruelty to me—to cut me in direct opposition to his express wishes?"

"You have done your best to come between us, I know," she exclaimed, a scornful light in her dark eyes, "to estrange me from my friend and benefactor, who, were he acquainted with your true character, would be the first to ignore you. You have deceived him, but you cannot deceive me, Mr. Fielding. Sooner than marry you I would incur my uncle's anger and the loss of all my present advantages, owing to him."

"What do you know to prejudice you so strongly against me?"

"The rumours I have heard respecting your past life, your present attitude and veiled threat, are more than enough. If you do not instantly take me back to the drawing-room, I will return by myself!"

"I swear you shall be my wife sooner or later. I love you too well to lose you," said Horace Fielding, vehemently, beneath his breath, as he tendered his arm, which Madeline dropped as soon as she found herself by her uncle again.

His double disappointment had rendered Horace Fielding furious. The girl he loved, and the girl whose wealth was absolutely indispensable to him in his bankrupt creditless condition, had refused him with a determination that augured ill for the future.

The fact of having wormed his way into Joshua Vernon's favour would go for little, after all, Horace Fielding reflected, in the face of Madeline's unyielding attitude. Even if she refused to accept the husband of his choice, the old man was not likely to adopt extreme measures towards his niece to influence her decision. Under ordinary circumstances, he could hardly hope to win her.

Pressed on all sides for money, angry with Madeline for the contemptuous words she had recently uttered, bent upon proving the supremacy of his will over hers, Lady Roscoe's hopeful brother spent the night in devising a plan of action for accomplishing his purpose, which would only have been entertained by a bold, thoroughly unscrupulous, and desperate man, who knew, moreover, that he had everything to gain and very little indeed to lose by it.

He required some help in the development of his scheme, yet he dared not take his sister into his confidence.

Gladys, although not overburdened with principle, had a great respect for social conventionalities and public opinion. She would not be willing to act in defiance of either,

especially since her own position as Lord Roscoe's wife and a leader of society was far too safe and exalted for her to do anything calculated to imperil it.

No, he must steer clear of Gladys in planning his desperate move and putting it into execution, he decided. If he revealed it to her she might feel constrained to betray him, rather than tacitly consent to such a breach of law and conventionality as that which he contemplated.

He smoked hard after reaching his rooms, and drank a great deal of brandy; then he adjourned to bed, rising late, and going out to make some necessary arrangements.

Joshua Vernon was undisguisedly angry when he became aware that Madeline had refused to marry his favourite, Horace Fielding. That young man had humoured and flattered him so adroitly as to win a very high place in his regard. Uncle Joshua could not understand or sympathise with his niece's prejudice against Fielding. He thought it unkind, unjust. He tried persuasion, argument, entreaty, in the endeavour to change her opinion, to induce her to accept Horace Fielding as her fiancé. When they failed to produce any impression upon her, he grew angry and vehement.

"Marry Fielding, and you shall have fifty thousand pounds as your wedding portion!" he said, sharply; "refuse, and I will leave you the proverbial shilling. Should I ask you to accept him if he were unworthy of you, pray? Your refusal is a direct reflection upon my judgment and discrimination in the choice of a husband for you. You have disappointed me, Madeline, more than a little."

"Ask me to do anything but this, dear Uncle Joshua, and I will gladly obey you," Madeline responded, with quivering lips. "I would rather die than marry Horace Fielding. You have been kind to me, far kinder than I deserve, and it grieves me to be compelled to act contrary to your will, yet I have no alternative. I am willing to go away, to leave you if you are tired of having me here. Mrs. Falconer has not engaged a companion yet. I can return to her."

Uncle Joshua drew in his horns at this. It would have given him real pain to forfeit his niece's society, to destroy the good understanding that existed between them on all points save one. With a growl he bade her never to allude to the subject again, while resuming his ordinary attitude towards her. Horace Fielding stayed away, and Madeline began to feel almost happy since the persecution had ceased.

She was sitting by herself in the drawing-room one evening, her uncle being absent at a City dinner. The weather was wild and boisterous, the wind high, hail dashing every now and then against the window panes. Absorbed in a new novel, cosily seated in an easy chair, Madeline hardly looked up as the footman entered the room bearing a note upon a silver salver, addressed to her.

As she opened it a little cry broke from her lips. The tremulous, uneven handwriting was that of Gervase Talbot, her missing lover!

"Come at once to the above address if you would see me again in life," ran the note. "I am very ill, not expected to recover. I will explain all when we meet, Madeline. By our mutual love I implore you to come, alone and unattended, without any delay to your unhappy lover—Gervase Talbot."

"Who brought this note?" she demanded, springing to her feet.

"A boy, miss," said the footman: "he went off at once without waiting for an answer."

"Get me a cab, please! I am going out," she continued rapidly. "I dare say I shall return before Mr. Vernon; but I will leave a note for him on the mantelpiece."

Considerably astonished and extremely curious, Charles went to hail a "growler" for his young mistress. Meanwhile, Madeline

changed her dress, wrapped herself in a fur-lined cloak, a little fur cap compactly crowning her dark, glossy braids, and indited a brief note, in which she informed her uncle of the nature of the errand that was taking her from home. She sealed this note, as a precaution against the prying propensities of the average domestic.

Ere twenty minutes had elapsed she was in the cab on her way towards Gervase Talbot, in prompt response to that unexpected summons, her mind in a state of chaos—joy, bewilderment, sorrow, relief, all struggling for the mastery. If she had a paramount thought it took the shape of thankfulness that he still lived.

"My love, my darling! what motive can have prompted you to hide yourself from me all this while?" she murmured; "what mystery is about to be revealed? Oh, it cannot be that you are dying! Heaven would not snatch you from me in the first moment of our reunion! My prayers, my ceaseless care and attention, will be permitted to restore you to life and health, and then the bitter past will be forgotten."

The address mentioned in the note purporting to come from Gervase Talbot was in a part of London quite unknown to Madeline—an obscure terrace in Kentish Town. The cabman seemed conversant with it, however, and drove quickly along.

In spite of her preoccupied, excited frame of mind, Madeline noticed that they were leaving all the large, well-lighted populous thoroughfares behind, and entering a dark and comparatively silent region, consisting principally of third-rate private houses. Gervase must be in poor circumstances, she repeated; that was why he had requested her to come alone. No suspicion of impropriety in thus granting his petition crossed her pure young mind.

Gervase was ill, and in need of her; it only remained to go to him at once, love and duty both pointing in the same direction. True modesty is devoid of all affectation or prudish scruples. Hence the frank fearlessness, the unhesitating devotion to the man she loved displayed by Madeline on receiving his note, imploring her to visit him.

"Number nineteen, Caroline-terrace, miss," said the cabman, jumping down from off his box as the cab stopped, and opening the door. "Shall I ring?"

"If you please," replied Madeline, getting out, and glancing curiously around her. It was too dark to see much, yet Caroline-terrace appeared to belong to the shabby-genteel style of town dwellings. Its three-storey houses had a dingy, battered aspect, and the high blank wall opposite gave an impression of dullness and desolation, accentuated by the dark stormy night.

"Is Mr. Talbot staying here?" she inquired of the landlady—a smartly-dressed elderly woman, with a sallow face and shifty dark eyes, who appeared in response to the cabman's ring.

"Quite right, miss; the gentleman is in the second-floor back," said the woman, promptly. "Will you come in?"

Madeline paid the cabman, and followed the landlady—who had bolted and locked the front door after him—upstairs with a palpitating heart. Would Gervase be much changed? Would—

"This is the room, miss," said the landlady, ushering Madeline into a tolerably well-furnished sitting-room at the back of the house on the second floor—a room communicating with another, the door of which was closed. A gentleman, who had been seated with his back to her, rose suddenly from the easy-chair as the landlady disappeared, and Madeline uttered an involuntary cry of anger and affright upon finding herself face to face with Horace Fielding!

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded, steadying herself by grasping the back

of a chair. "Where is Mr. Talbot? I came here to see him."

"And to find me waiting here in his stead is, of course, a bitter disappointment to Miss Vernon," said Horace Fielding, in a tone of easy courtesy, an evil smile lurking in his light blue eyes. "I am sorry that I cannot inform you as to Mr. Talbot's present whereabouts, since I am quite unacquainted with them."

"And that note?"

"I must confess to having written it. I knew it would bring you."

"Mr. Fielding, I knew you to be an unprincipled, worthless man. I did not deem you capable, though, of such villany as that you have dared to commit!"

The terrible nature of her position was beginning to dawn upon her, yet she was more angry than frightened. The scorn in her eyes and her voice made Horace Fielding writhe mentally beneath it.

"I strove to win you by fair means in the first instance," he said, fiercely, savagely, his worst passions aroused, his mean nature up in arms. "It is your fault if, through your unyielding attitude towards me, I have been driven to adopt foul ones rather than lose you. At least, my note has fulfilled its purpose."

"What was your motive, pray, in thus imitating another man's handwriting? What object do you hope to gain by my presence here to-night?"

"I shall gain you," he said, slowly and emphatically. "I am not a man to be trifled with, Madeline, when I—I have—set my heart upon any particular consummation. You will remain here in these rooms, which I have secured for you until such time as you consent to become my wife. Escape from them will be impossible; yet the doors will stand open to you on the day you consent to marry me!"

"Are you mad?" she demanded, pale but resolute. "You dare not detain me here against my will. This is London, and the twentieth century, while such an act as that contemplated by you would bring you within reach of the law. Abduction cases belong to a by-gone age. I shall appeal to the landlady to release me."

"She is a friend of mine," said Horace Fielding, standing between Madeline and the door. "She is acting under my instructions. An appeal to her would be worse than useless. It can hardly be called an abduction case, seeing that you came here, alone of your own accord to meet me. Your hurried departure from home will give rise to many conjectures, which your prolonged absence will serve to strengthen. A marriage between us can alone prevent you from being seriously compromised—now!"

The hatred and loathing, the speechless

scorn in her eyes, grew deeper as she listened to him.

"Thank heaven!" she exclaimed, "your plans are foiled! I left a note addressed to my uncle, informing him where I had gone, and on what errand. A few hours hence he will be here inquiring for me, should I fail to return. Now, will you open that door and let me go?"

"And you think I was not prepared for such a contingency?" he said, doggedly. "Should Mr. Vernon come here in search of you, he will be informed that you quitted the house nearly an hour after entering it with the gentleman you came to see. Your only hope of escape lies in becoming my wife. Otherwise, there is every chance of your remaining here for months—perhaps years! I am not easily discouraged, Madeline. I will leave you now if you desire it, to return again to-morrow. The landlady will attend to your requirements."

A sense of being trapped, caged, hopelessly at this man's mercy, began to oppress the girl, brave as she was.

"Do you not fear society's verdict when once your infamous conduct in using Gervase Talbot's name to decoy me from home becomes known, as it must do sooner or later?" she asked, pushing the dark wavy hair back

from her forehead with feverish trembling hands. "You—a gentleman!"

"My ruse cannot transpire until after we are married," he said passionately. "I shall not even be suspected. The blame of having carried you off will rest upon Gervase Talbot until then; and then—well, you will hardly gain anything by villifying your husband."

Madeline rushed to the window. It only commanded a view of a dreary walled-in back garden.

She was in every sense of the word a prisoner, and the knowledge rendered her slightly hysterical.

"Let me go," she cried wildly. "Horace Fielding, what have I done that you should plan this fiendish design to wreck my happiness and my reputation? I tell you even now that I would sooner die a thousand deaths than become your wife!"

With a sudden change of mood he flung himself upon his knees before her.

"Madeline," he exclaimed, hoarsely, striving to clasp her hands in his; "forgive me, pity me! If I loved you less I should not have played this desperate card. Oh! my darling, try to love me, only a little in return, and my whole life shall be devoted to rendering yours happy. Only give yourself to me, and I can, I will, atone for the wrong I have committed."

Her only answer was a wild cry for help, repeated again and again.

You may know what is going on in your own house, but a London especially, you cannot tell what your next-door neighbour is up to.

A door of communication had once been made between 19, Caroline Terrace, and the next house to it, when the same family occupied both dwellings.

To suit subsequent tenants this door had been locked, the landlord holding the key. The little grating over it and the door itself, which opened into the sitting-room where Madeline stood, had been papered over and entirely concealed on that side, forming apparently part of the wall.

On the other side of it was a bed-sitting-room, which the landlady of No. 20 had recently let to a gentleman lodger.

Madeline's cries reached him plainly through the grating. Throwing aside his book he made for the locked door.

A few vigorous kicks burst it open, tearing through the paper wall on the other side.

Madeline, to her profound astonishment, beheld a man coming through the wall to her aid.

"What is amiss?" asked the new-comer, glancing inquiringly at her; then in a changed hoarse voice, "Is it possible? Good heavens! Madeline!"

"Gervase! Oh, save me; take me from this dreadful house!" she cried, as she fell fainting into his arms.

CHAPTER X.

It was, indeed, Gervase Talbot, older, sterner, the first fresh beauty of his manhood gone, the look of one who had been through the valley of the shadow of death in some horrible form of suffering, the effects of which still haunted him, graven upon his pale, worn, still handsome face.

Horace Fielding regarded him with a blending of stupefied rage and astonishment. The recognition that had taken place between Madeline and this man was sufficient to establish his identity.

He had ventured to use Talbot's name in order to ensnare her, and, as if it had been an incantation, it had brought the artist upon them in this extraordinary manner. He had risen, as it were, from the dead to rescue the woman they both loved.

"What the deuce do you mean, sir, by bursting into another house through the wall, and presuming to interfere with my arrangements?" he demanded, furiously.

"An explanation of your conduct would be more to the purpose under the circumstances,"

said Gervase Talbot, contemptuously. "Mine is easily accounted for. Madeline," bending over the chair in which he had placed her, "who is this man, and what are you doing here?"

She pulled the crumpled note bearing Gervase Talbot's signature from her pocket, and placed it in his hands, hardly able to realize as yet that he was indeed restored to her.

"I received it two hours ago," she said, brokenly, "and I came at once. I would have gone to the world's end had you sent for me, Gervase. You did not, you could not have lent your sanction to such a shameful deed!"

His unexpected appearance, as strange as it was opportune, confused and bewildered her, taken in conjunction with the note purporting to come from him which she had received. It seemed incredible that no connecting link should exist between them, yet so it was.

"I don't understand," said Gervase Talbot, after reading it; "this note was not written by me, although my signature has been attached to it. I only returned to England a month ago—and as yet I have not attempted to communicate with you, Madeline, for various reasons. Neither am I ill. It is a forgery!"

"Yes, the production of Mr. Horace Fielding, Lady Roscoe's brother!" said Madeline, recovering her composure a little, and striving to grasp the many features presented by the situation, wounded love forcing its way uppermost.

Since Gervase was alive and well why had he not communicated with her all this long while? "It seemed as if he had even tried to avoid her," she thought, sadly.

Gervase Talbot started as she uttered Lady Roscoe's name; then he looked sternly across at Horace Fielding.

"Mr. Fielding requested me not long ago to marry him," continued Madeline, "and I refused. He wrote that note for the purpose of bringing me here under a false impression. It was his intention to detain me here until I promised to become his wife, in order to save my good name."

The artist's relief kept pace with his anger. Madeline cared nothing for this fellow then, he told himself, thankfully. She had come expecting to see her former lover, in answer to his supposed summons. Such forgiveness and forbearance on her part, touched, while it astonished him.

"And what price does Mr. Fielding expect to pay for the privilege of signing another man's name, of doing his best to compromise an innocent girl in order to compel her to marry him?" he asked, his face flushing ominously. "You can! if you ever dare to show your face in society again after this I'll have you publicly disgraced."

Mad with a sense of shame and utter failure, Horace Fielding laughed insolently.

"Certainly it was beneath a gentleman's dignity to avail himself of your name," he sneered. "An obscure dauber, who found it convenient to efface himself abruptly, to disappear below the surface, leaving no trace behind."

"Gervase, take me home. Do not stay to quarrel with him!" whispered Madeline, imploringly.

"Will you allow me and this lady to pass you?" said Gervase, approaching the door, still guarded by Horace Fielding.

The answer was an oath. Fielding, who had been drinking to keep his courage up, was hardly master of himself.

The artist's eyes flashed. With a blow dealt straight from the shoulder he sent Horace Fielding flying to the other end of the room, just as the landlady, alarmed by the noise made in bursting open the locked door, entered it.

Fearful of the consequences to herself, of losing her reputation in the neighbourhood,

she began to pour forth extenuating pleas, to transfer all blame from her shoulders to the broader ones of Horace Fielding. Gervase Talbot interrupted her without ceremony.

"Fetch a cab!" he said briefly. "I am inclined to regard you as Mr. Fielding's accomplice in this matter. If you would escape punishment you will remain silent with regard to all that has happened here to-night."

The cab procured, Madeline went downstairs and got into it, accompanied by Gervase Talbot, no further attempt being made by Horace Fielding, who had picked himself up, to prevent their departure.

"You know my address?" said Madeline, in a tone of surprise, as she heard Gervase mention it to the cabman.

"Yes!" he replied, as they drove along through the wild, windy night. "I made inquiries about you, Madeline, immediately upon my return to England. I ascertained the good fortune that had fallen to your share, and Mr. Vernon's town address. I have walked by the house many times during the last month in the vain hope of obtaining a glimpse of you!"

"But why not call?" she asked. "Gervase, where have you been? What became of you on that night? You suffered me to think of you as dead. It was cruel, cruel! Have you no explanation to offer?"

He had not attempted to kiss her. His manner was reserved and sombre. He seemed to be keeping himself under by strong, painful effort. What could have happened to change him thus?

"Madeline, have you forgiven me yet?" he cried, suddenly. "I have been sorely punished for my folly, my brief madness. Do not judge me too harshly!"

"Forgive you!" she repeated, wondering. "What is there to forgive, save your inexplicable absence and long silence? Gervase, dear Gervase!" bursting into sudden tears of mingled grief and gladness, "what cloud has come between us?"

Her wonder began to be reflected in his eyes.

"You received my letter?" he said, interrogatively. "The one posted on the eve of my disappearance?"

"No. The last letter I received from you bore date a week previous," was the reply. "That was the last communication of any kind that reached me. Did you write again after that?"

"Yes."

"Then the letter must have been lost in transit. How very—"

"And you have gone on caring for me all this time?" he interrupted. "You have never ceased to love me, Madeline, to regard yourself as mine?"

"No, Gervase; yet if you—"

He folded her in his arms in a rapture of welcome blessed relief and thankfulness. He rained kisses upon brow, and cheek, and lips. Such vehement demonstrative love, following hard upon his estranged demeanour, started while it soothed and reassured her, setting all her fears at rest.

"Oh, my love! my darling! my good angel!" he exclaimed, passionately. "I am unworthy of you, and yet to feel, to know, that you are still mine in your gentle worth and purity has filled me with fresh life, and driven away the shadows that haunted me!"

Then, to increase her perplexity, Gervase Talbot, who had just been so valiant in her defence, drooped his head upon her shoulder and sobbed like a child. She forgot her own agitation in soothing his, so strange and unwonted.

"Now that we are reunited, dear, nothing shall ever part us again," she said, bravely, passing her hand caressingly through the short crisp waves of red-gold hair she remembered so well. "Gervase, my Gervase! since you are restored to me I care for nothing else. You shall tell me just as much or as little as

you please respecting the events of the past year. I can trust you, as of old!"

"You shall know all—in relation to my disappearance, I mean," he replied, regaining his self-control. "I was not to blame for that. It is a long story, in no wise redounding to the credit of my cousin, Percy Dennison. If ever a fiend existed in human form it is he. I am only biding my time, remaining perdu for a while, in order to strengthen the reprisal when it comes. He sent me to a fate a thousand times more horrible than death. As if by a miracle I have escaped, and been able to aid you in an extremity as well, to effect your deliverance. Let Percy Dennison be on his guard when next we meet. I shall not spare him!"

"Was he entirely responsible for your disappearance?" cried Madeline.

"Yes. He wanted me to sell Ingfield to him, and when I refused he set himself to get rid of me. He must have known of the existence of this quarry even then, and longed to get possession of the estate to work it."

"Then I have not suspected him unjustly," she replied. "I felt that he was in some way connected with your fate. Through all these long, cruel, suspenseful months I have doubted him."

"My poor little girl, what you must have suffered on my account!" exclaimed Gervase Talbot, fiercely. "It shall be all added up when my reckoning comes off with Percy Dennison. I am looking forward to it. I would not forego it to save his worthless life. And now," as the cab stopped, "for your uncle. Is he very formidable, Madeline?"

"Only rather," was the reply. "Don't contradict him, whatever you do, and make a little allowance for probable temper, especially tonight."

Joshua Vernon, having returned from the City dinner to find that note on the drawing-room mantelpiece, and his niece still absent, was about, as he had predicted, to follow her when the cab drove up, and Gervase and Madeline alighted from it.

"Uncle Joseph, this is Mr. Talbot!" she said, introducing the two men, a kind of radiance, the result of intense happiness, resting upon her lovely face, and shining in her eyes.

"Indeed—humph, bless my soul! Glad to make your acquaintance, sir, and to learn that you are still in existence," replied Uncle Joshua, glancing keenly at the artist as he spoke. "Madeline, my dear, it was rather extraordinary of you to go off in that way by yourself to a strange address. You have made me very uneasy about you, and I thought, from what you said, that Mr. Talbot was at death's door. He could only have given a runaway knock."

"The note I received was not written by him at all," explained Madeline, throwing her arms around the old man's neck. "Oh, Uncle Joshua, I have had such a narrow escape, and it was Gervase who saved me!"

Then, in rather incoherent style, with occasional assistance from Gervase Talbot to help out her story, Madeline informed her astonished and indignant relative of the dishonourable ruse by means of which Horace Fielding had drawn her from home, his object in so doing, and Gervase Talbot's timely intervention.

To say that Joshua Vernon flew into a passion when Fielding's villainy was disclosed to him would be to put it mildly. He was simply beside himself with rage at the indignity offered to his niece, while his former high opinion of Horace Fielding, so obstinately adhered to, tended to increase his anger against that gentleman, since it had proved so erroneous. A more mistaken conception of a man's character had never been arrived at. Joshua Vernon, compelled to admit this, felt furious, since it reflected upon his own powers of discernment.

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed the angry old man. "He shall suffer for this, Madeline. That I should have formed such a good opinion of him. But he hoodwinked me, and the cleverest man living might have been

deceived by his plausible manner. The scoundrel! I'll make London too hot to hold him in less than twenty-four hours. Mr. Talbot," pausing to grasp the artist's hand, "I owe you a debt of gratitude for rescuing my little girl. I daresay she will undertake to pay it, though. That you should be so close at hand was nothing short of providential. I never ascribe these things to chance myself. You were thus enabled to deliver her from a most compromising position. And that fellow, is he still at the house? Did you leave him there?"

It took all Madeline's power of persuasion, aided by Gervase, to prevent Joshua Vernon from going in quest of Horace Fielding that very night, to inflict condign punishment upon him. He yielded reluctantly to their representations that it would be undesirable to give publicity to the affair, that other means of dealing with Horace Fielding, and compelling him to account for his conduct, would be found later on.

"And you, sir," said Uncle Joshua, turning sharply upon Gervase, compelled, in spite of gratitude owing, to give vent to his irritation in some shape or form. "Surely there is an explanation due with regard to your conduct in disappearing so mysteriously, and not allowing my niece, to whom you were or are still engaged, to know what had become of you?"

"Certainly; and I think when you have listened to that explanation, Mr. Vernon, you will exonerate me from all blame in the matter," replied Gervase Talbot, with a quiet dignity that set well upon him. "I owe my strange disappearance from society entirely to my cousin, Percy Dennison, whose anxiety to gain possession of Ingfield Park induced him—well, as he imagined, to suppress me effectually."

"The deuce it did!" exclaimed Uncle Joshua. "Well, at any rate, I never formed a high opinion of Mr. Dennison. That is one comfort. Do you mean to say he tried to kill you?"

"That would have been merciful compared with the devilish malice—the fate prepared for me!" said Gervase Talbot, the stern, unrelenting look flashing again in his eyes.

Madeline, listening intently, crept close to him, and slid her hand with a reassuring, loving clasp into his.

"My cousin met me that night by the riverside," he went on, "as I was smoking my cigar, and proposed an adjournment to his rooms. He had a matter of business to discuss with me, he said, and I went with him accordingly. Supper was laid for us, and during the meal he renewed his offer to purchase Ingfield Park of me, and for the second time I refused to entertain it."

"The wine I drank must have been drugged. I can just remember being helped downstairs by him and into a cab, then I became unconscious. When I came fairly to my senses again I was at sea, fastened down in my berth, unable to move. When I attempted to rise a kind of network, stretched over the berth, and brought even with my throat, well-nigh strangled me."

"At first I could not understand or realise my position. When I angrily questioned the captain, who, with his son, a deaf mute, were the only people I saw for many days, he refused to give me any direct answer. I threatened him; and the brute, Percy Dennison's confederate in villainy, laughed and bade me do my worst against him, should I ever get the chance!"

"My friends, he added, had sent me on a long sea voyage for the benefit of my health; and my treatment on board would depend to a great extent on my behaviour."

"Then, for the first time, the horrible idea that my cousin was answerable for this crime, that he had deliberately planned it, in order to get rid of me that he might inherit Ingfield, crossed my mind. It drove me nearly frantic with rage and pain. I had sufficient sense, however, to behave quietly,

since resistance was worse than useless, whatever the fate in store for me might be."

"After some days had elapsed I was permitted to go on deck. I noticed the crew all gave me a wide berth. If I spoke to them they never replied. The captain had described me as a dangerous lunatic, intrusted to his care, and thus all my protests, my attempts to enlist sympathy and aid, went for nothing."

"Ours was, I found, a small trading vessel bound for the Hawaiian Islands. What they purposed doing with me when there I vainly strove to discover from that villain, the captain."

"The cargo was landed at length, another shipped in its place, still I was kept a close prisoner on board. One day, the last ere he set sail for England, I was ordered by the captain to come on deck. A boat ready manned was waiting, and I got into it. Was I actually to be set at liberty? Had the captain been frightened into releasing me? My heart beat high with hope. Yet the crew would not speak to me; they shrank from my very touch. Presently they landed me on an island at some distance from the rest, and rowed swiftly away."

"Some natives were hurrying down to the shore to greet the newcomer. I went towards them. Merciful heaven! what forms! what sights of horror! Some bloated and swollen out of all semblance to humanity, some shrivelled up to mere sticks, the skin drawn tightly over the staring bones, others minus limbs and features—all alike horrible. I had been landed upon the Hawaiian leper island!"

An exclamation burst simultaneously from the lips of Madeline and Uncle Joshua.

"I ascertained afterwards," Gervase continued, "that the captain had informed the authorities I was suffering from English leprosy, as well as being wrong in my head, and they had consented to my removal to the island, where these unhappy creatures live in strict seclusion. Once in contact with them I should, of course, contract the complaint, and die a lingering death of the most horrible description. This was how Percy Dennison, too cowardly to commit a direct murder, purposed to get rid of me!"

"He is a fiend!" cried Madeline.

"I recognized them as lepers, fortunately," Gervase went on, "and made signs for them to keep at a distance from me. They did so. Presently a white man, a German pastor in charge of the mission to the lepers, came along."

"I described my position to him, to learn in return where I was, and the complaint I was stated to be suffering from. This put the finishing touch to my previous sufferings. In broken German I revealed to him the plot of which I had been a victim."

"The pastor was very kind. He took me to his own cottage, ascertained that I was free from any taint of leprosy, and made me his guest. A long and severe illness kept me a prisoner there for months. When I recovered I left that fearful island in the vessel that brought provisions for the lepers; the English consul paid my passage home to England. But for presence of mind and the pastor's interposition I should have been there still—a leper like the rest. One touch would have sealed my fate!"

"Good heavens, what an escape!" said Uncle Joshua, his eyes suspiciously moist. "And your cousin? There is no punishment adequate to such an offence; yet he must and shall suffer!"

"I am going down to Ingfield next week," replied Gervase, with a peculiar smile, "to let him know that I have returned in safety."

CHAPTER XI.

Once again Ingfield was en fête. Percy Dennison, the virtual master there, since Gervase Talbot had never returned to claim his own, was striving to ingratiate himself with the county people, and to become generally popular throughout the neighbourhood. In furtherance of this object he had promised to

supply the stone with which to build a new church from the recently-discovered quarry in the Park, that was already yielding him a fortune.

The foundation-stone of the new building was to be laid to-day, and Inglesfield had plenty to occupy its attention. A countess was to perform the ceremony. A bishop was coming to pronounce the benediction after it.

Although late in the year the day proved fine and cloudless, and as the hour appointed for the public and much talked-of event drew nigh, the site of the church became crowded to excess.

Of course, a space immediately around the stone had been roped off for the elite and those invited by Percy Dennison, including the bishop and the countess. This enclosure was prettily decorated with red baize, flowers, and ferns. Outside it, his soft felt hat drawn low over his face, unnoticed, undetected, stood the rightful owner of Inglesfield, Gervase Talbot, waiting for the ceremony to begin.

The suffering and disillusion through which he had recently passed, the shameful wrong still unavenged, had not been without their effect upon the artist's character.

He was less gay and light-hearted than of old. He did not live so much upon the surface of things. He had gained in concentration of purpose; his judgment was less faulty, his will stronger. From that terrible experience he had returned a sadder and a wiser man, with his own keen love for Madeline Vernon once more in the ascendant.

During his absence the scales and dropped from his eyes. Gladys Fielding's spell had been broken. She had merely bewitched his senses, and cast a glamour over him; his heart remained true in its allegiance to Madeline. This was the knowledge he woke up to with a start after that fatal letter had been penned and sent to Madeline.

The news of Gladys Fielding's marriage helped to increase his disillusion in that quarter, to prove her utter infidelity and worldliness; for had she cared for him as she professed to do, could she have wedded Lord Roscoe so soon after his disappearance? Fool and madman that he had been to reject gold for himself, the substance for the shadow.

On returning to England he had not ventured to seek Madeline out, to implore her forgiveness. The letter in which he had confessed his love for Gladys Fielding, and requested her to release him, must for ever stand between them, he reflected. Then had come the unexpected meeting with Madeline, the welcome information that the letter had never reached her, that, blissfully ignorant of his brief infidelity, she still regarded herself as engaged to him.

He accepted the precious treasure of her love thankfully, gladly, as a gift of which he was unworthy, yet, failing which, he would have found it hard to live. The letter had somehow miscarried. Its contents should ever remain a secret to her. In return for this restored happiness, so undeserved on his part, he would do his utmost to atone by love and devotion for the wrong she had unconsciously suffered. Fate had been kind to him, after all, in some respects. It had suppressed that letter.

Horace Fielding had escaped punishment by quitting England for the continent, leaving no address behind, after that scandal at Caroline-terrace, Camden-town. His sister, Lady Roscoe, to whom he had reluctantly admitted it when compelled to ask her for funds, wrote to Joshua Vernon, disclaiming any previous knowledge of her brother's dishonourable act, and expressing her sincere regret at what had occurred.

Uncle Joshua responded in a strain of formal courtesy, accepting Lady Roscoe's explanation without demur, as it regarded herself, yet in no wise disguising his opinion of Horace Fielding's conduct.

Madeline and her uncle had accompanied Gervase Talbot to Inglesfield for the foundation ceremony. They stood a little apart from him in the crowd. Madeline, thick-

voiled, and full of nervous anticipation, Uncle Joshua grimly pleased with the punishment and disgrace—so well merited—in store for Percy Dennison.

He, unconscious of the Nemesis awaiting him in the crowd, is chatting with his guests, every now and then welcoming some new arrival, his dark, saturnine face radiant for once, and smiling. It is pleasant to be regarded as a man of considerable local importance, a public benefactor, to command the society of bishops and countesses, and Percy Dennison thoroughly enjoys his enhanced position. No vision of the far-away leper island and its miserable inhabitants seems to dim his happiness and satisfaction as he stands there, laughing and talking in the radiant sunshine.

Gervase Talbot set his teeth hard as the white-robed procession of choristers, followed by the clergy in cassocks, snowy surplices, academical hoods, and elaborately-embroidered stoles, drew nigh. After prayer and singing the stone was declared to be well and truly laid by the pretty countess, dressed from head to foot in mauve. Then followed more singing, and the thoughts of those present began to stray towards the luncheon prepared for them at Inglesfield House.

The vicar's speech came next. In it he alluded to the generosity and munificence displayed by the owner of Inglesfield Park in supplying the stone with which to build the new church, tendering his own thanks for the gift, as well as those of his parishioners.

"The rightful owner of Inglesfield is here in person to acknowledge the speech just made!" cried a clear, ringing voice, as Gervase Talbot, removing his hat, strode forward into the midst of the astonished group.

Percy Dennison's dark face became corpse-like in its pallor. He resembled some desperate beast at bay.

"You here!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, staggering back against the woodwork and scaffolding.

"Yes! alive and well," was the response.

"No thanks to you, though, Percy!"

"It's Mr. Talbot, that was missing, come back again," runs round the outside crowd, all craning their necks to see and hear better. "Sure enough, it's Mr. Talbot," and then an attempt was made to raise a cheer.

Gervase put up his hand to check it. Then he glanced round the little circle of well-bred, fashionably-dressed men and women, their faces expressive of intense curiosity, while just beyond them he saw the expectant choristers and the clergy; the latter apprehensive lest any scandal should mar the ceremony just concluded.

"You are doubtless at a loss to understand why I have thought fit to announce my return in such abrupt fashion," he said, in clear, steady tones amidst the universal silence. "Since my cousin, Mr. Dennison, is silent, I will explain the circumstances that led to my disappearance, and then leave you to form your own opinion of him."

Briefly and succinctly he recounted the events of that fateful night, the invitation to Percy Dennison's rooms, the drugged wine, the sea voyage, and his experience of the Hawaiian leper island, describing, in conclusion, his escape from the horrible fate intended for him, and his return to England.

A deep-drawn breath, a profound shudder, went round his immediate audience as he ceased speaking, while from the less aristocratic one outside arose groans and yells, intended for Percy Dennison. Those standing by fell away from him, as if they had discerned in the detected plover a moral leper, whose silence served to prove his guilt.

"I could have forgiven him more easily," said Gervase Talbot, sternly, "had he attempted to blow my brains out and failed; but the devilish malignity of the scheme adopted in order to obtain possession of the estate, which I had refused to sell to him,

had you no spark of pity or humanity left in you for the man you sent to such a living death?"

Beyond a significant scowl, expressive of deadly hatred, the wretched criminal made no reply.

"Shall I arrest the gentleman, sir?" asked the village constable, elbowing his way towards Gervase Talbot.

"No," was the answer, waited for amidst breathless silence. "He is free so far as I am concerned. My vengeance stops short at publicly disgracing him, and dragging him down from the position he sinned so deeply to obtain. I have unmasked and denounced him—that is sufficient. The sooner he quits Inglesfield, never to return to it again, the better."

A dissentient murmur greeted this decision. Public opinion was in favour of Percy Dennison being far more severely punished. Gervase Talbot's forbearance did not meet with approval. In the confusion of hand-shaking and congratulations that ensued the barister slipped away, as he hoped, unperceived.

"I shall be glad if you will consent to carry out the original programme, so far as to lunch with me at Inglesfield House," said Gervase to the friends who surrounded him, while Madeline, recognised by now, came in for a large share of attention.

A few declined, but the majority accepted the invitation. Blue blood seldom refuses a good feed at somebody else's expense. The news had reached the servants at the House, and they were drawn up in the front hall to receive their new master when he arrived with Madeline Vernon, soon to become his wife, leaving upon his arm.

It was not a very hilarious meal. The recent scene had left too deep an impression for that. Percy Dennison's crime occupied the thoughts of all present. Nevertheless, they ate and drank, and congratulated Gervase upon the discovery of the quarry during his absence, discussing items of local news to keep more embarrassing topics at bay; while Madeline, as Gervase Talbot's fiancée, was an object of much interest, especially to the women present, some of whom secretly envied her.

The artist heaved a sigh of relief when, his guests departed, and Uncle Joshua enjoying a snooze, he was free to roam through the house and grounds with Madeline.

"Darling, you will not keep me waiting for my wife," he said, kissing her fondly, as they stood side by side in the dim old portrail-gallery. "I should like a date set for our wedding."

"Three months hence; will that do?" she asked, hiding her blushing face upon his breast. "I have promised Uncle Joshua not to desert him sooner."

"Bless the old gentleman! He can live with us if he likes," said Gervase, "if it would please you, pet. He isn't a mother-in-law."

"Oh, Gervase, you are so thoughtful, so generous," she exclaimed. "He would like it immensely, I know. Poor Uncle Joshua, he dreads the idea of losing me. There is only one thing I can't understand," she went on. "Why did you not seek me out immediately upon reaching England to apprise me of your safety? Why, when we did meet by accident, as it were, your manner was so cold, so reticent at first? It thawed later on, or I should have thought you had ceased to love me. To be in England a month without coming to me. Was that kind, Gervase?"

He looked embarrassed.

"My darling girl, why refer to the past since we are so happy in the present?" he said, evasively. "Of course I—I should have revealed myself to you if that Camden Town episode had not expedited matters in bringing us together again. I was ill and unstrung at the time, and I needed a little space in which to rest and recruit myself before coming to the surface and confronting Percy Dennison."

Who could have nursed and tended him more sedulously than herself? His strange behaviour in the cab that night, his sudden change of manner, still perplexed the girl.

"What was the nature of the communication I failed to receive, and the non-delivery of which seemed to relieve you rather than otherwise?" she asked, playfully.

"Oh, nothing of any consequence—now," he rejoined, hastily. "A mere farrago of nonsense, written in a moment of folly, of disgust with the whole world in general, and myself in particular—folly long since lost sight of. Put on your hat, Madeline, and let us visit the quarry. I am anxious to see how it is worked."

And they went.

Percy Dennison was not permitted to escape scot-free. Some of the rougher spirits of Inglesfield had detected him in his attempt to reach the railway station unperceived, and hustled him freely, tearing his clothes and destroying his hat.

He narrowly avoided a ducking in the horse-pond as well. Battered, dishevelled, furious, he flung himself at length into a carriage, and escaped his pursuers, his character ruined as well as his hat, and the fortune, to gain which he had schemed and planned, lost to him for ever.

Madeline was back in town making preparations for her approaching marriage.

Gervase Talbot, whose strange adventures had rendered him an extremely popular and much-sought-after member of society, was also in town, a daily visitor at the Vernons' house.

Madeline was alone one morning when a letter—handed to her among others—came by post. It had been sent on from Inglesfield. The envelope was blue and official-looking, the legend "On His Majesty's Service" ran across the top.

Somewhat curiously she opened it, to find another envelope, worn and dirty, addressed to her in Gervase Talbot's handwriting, encased with a few lines from the postmaster at Chelsea.

The letter had slipped down behind some woodwork when posted, and only just been brought to light.

That was more than a year ago, as she would see by the date. He sent it on to her, regretting the unavoidable delay in delivery.

"Why, it must be the letter Gervase was inquiring about, that never reached me!" she exclaimed, as she tore it open. "How very odd that it should turn up after all these months! Now I shall know what he said to me in it."

As she read the closely-written pages her face blanched—a look of anguish crept into her dark eyes. A little moan of intense pain broke from her lips. That letter had slain at one blow all her recently-discovered happiness!

Gervase in love with Gladys Fielding, now Lady Roscoe! Gervase imploring her to release him from his engagement, declaring his willingness to marry her if she insisted upon it, yet hinting that it must needs be an unhappy match, since his feelings towards her had changed! Gervase blaming himself bitterly for his folly and weakness, and entreating her forgiveness all in a breath!

Could it be true? Oh, what a revelation for a girl soon to become a bride! She cowered down and hid her face in her hands, crushed, broken-hearted!

That letter had made all plain. Gervase had not sought her out on returning to England, or assumed a lover-like air when they met, because he thought it had put an end to their engagement.

It was only when he found the letter had not reached her that he resumed the old loving attitude. Why had he done so? From pity—from a want of courage to reveal the truth, to tell her that he no longer cared for her!

And at that moment Gervase Talbot was announced.

"Madeline, it was a brief frenzy," he said, passionately, as, in reply to his question re-

garding her changed looks, she placed that letter just received in his hand, "a frenzy of which I was heartily ashamed long ere I heard of Gladys Fielding's marriage. I could have cried for joy when you told me that you had not received that cursed letter, the record of my folly, that your love and trust in me were still unabated. That it should have come to light now is part of my punishment, I suppose. Madeline, I swear to you that I have long since ceased to feel aught but dislike and contempt for the woman who bewitched me. You will not allow this folly of mine—so bitterly repented of—to stand between us and our happiness? You will forgive me?"

"I forgive you," she said, gently; "but, Gervase, I cannot, after this, become your wife. We are no longer engaged!"

"Why not?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Madeline, my senses may have gone astray, but my heart was ever yours. You are a thousand times dearer to me now than of old. Is a man to be placed beyond the pale of forgiveness because he was once guilty of a short-lived infatuation?"

"No! not when that infatuation is past and over—impossible to recur again," remarked Madeline, her white hands nervously clasped, a kind of dull anguish burning in her eyes. "This, however, may belong to the present; its influences may overshadow you a second time, and on that account we must part. All is over between us; and I—shall never blame you. Were you to marry me now you might regret it later on, and I, oh! I think it would kill me to know that I was standing between you and Lady Roscoe."

What could she mean? As she quitted the room his eyes fell upon the "Times," which she had been reading when the letters arrived. Mechanically he read the announcement of the sudden death of Lord Roscoe from heart disease.

CHAPTER XII.

"He must have been a big thing in burglars, that fellow just caught!"

"Yes! the daily papers describe his house in the suburbs as being splendidly furnished—almost every article in it the proceeds of some robbery."

"In that case he would doubtless describe his piano, if he'd got one, as a Collard and Collard!"

"It's really dreadful," said another voice, when the laugh had subsided, "to know that such clever, daring thieves exist. I shall dream of burglars to-night. What if they were to come here and steal Lady Roscoe's diamonds?"

"Talking of dreams, I had a beauty last night," replied the previous speaker. "I thought I was in Africa, that I had been introduced to, and done something to vex Gagool, that interesting old lady in 'King Solomon's Mines.' She was dancing all round me, clawing the air with her skinny fingers, and making the most awful faces. I woke with a yell. I wonder I didn't startle some of you."

"Gagool was doubtless the offspring of indigestion, dear boy!"

The scene was the drawing-room of Fernbrook Abbey. A number of young people forming part of the large and distinguished house-party enjoying the hospitality of the owner, Lord Fernbrook, were assembled there, prevented from seeking outdoor recreation by the rain.

Among the guests at Fernbrook were Joshua Vernon and his niece. They had accepted the invitation, to learn upon arriving, when it was too late to retreat, that Lady Roscoe was under the same roof with them, while Gervase Talbot, now M.P. for his county, and blissfully ignorant of the double encounter in store for him, was shortly expected.

Annoyed as he felt on Madeline's account, since the situation could hardly fail to prove more or less embarrassing to her, Joshua Vernon was compelled to stand his ground, and Madeline, with the quiet, graceful dignity, the spirit she could evince at will, seconded him in so doing.

"We will leave as soon as we can find some reasonable excuse for going, Uncle Joshua, not before," she said, bravely, concealing the dread she felt at the ordeal before her—the meeting with her old lover, and the rival who had come between them.

Two years had elapsed since the discovery of that fatal letter had put an end to the contemplated marriage between Gervase Talbot and Madeline Vernon—years fraught with keen pain and suffering for both the man and woman concerned.

Gervase Talbot's passionate pleading, renewed again and again during the first few months, had failed to shake Madeline's decision, to induce her to become his wife.

It was not that she loved him less, or found it impossible to forgive that brief infidelity revealed to her in the long detained letter.

Deeply as its contents had wounded her heart they had not affected her love for the handsome, repentant sinner. She had forgiven him, freely, fully, yet in her opinion a barrier, an inseparable obstacle, must for ever keep them apart.

She could not, dared not, believe in the reascendancy of his old love for her over that infatuation for Gladys Fielding which had prompted him to write the letter which had destroyed her happiness.

All his earnest protestations that she, and she alone, was dear and necessary to him failed to convince her.

Madeline could not shake off the cruel conviction that, in seeking to make her his wife, Gervase Talbot was actuated by a sense of pity or justice, a desire to fulfil his promise at any cost, rather than by love.

Something deeper than a passing pang, she told herself, must have drawn him from his allegiance to her in the direction of beautiful, brilliant Gladys Fielding. Hence she refused to yield to his pleadings, although her heart cried out for him more strenuously than ever.

Now that Gladys, Lady Roscoe, was a widow, wealthy, free to marry whom she pleased, Madeline was still less likely to marry Gervase, to stand between him and the woman she gave him credit for loving better than herself. Had Lord Roscoe lived she might have proved less obdurate.

The strange coincidence that had brought them together at Fernbrook Abbey was not without its attractions for Lady Roscoe. Her heart beat high with hope when she heard that Gervase Talbot was expected.

She would be able to observe his attitude towards Madeline Vernon, at one time his fiancée—to ascertain if he still cared for that pale, stately, dark-eyed girl.

More lovely and irresistible, more imperious than of yore, Lady Roscoe hoped by means of her rich glowing beauty to rivet the old fetters anew, to draw back to her side the man she had never ceased to love, the man whom, of all others, she would gladly have wed, since fortune had dealt kindly with them both.

"It will be a drawn battle between us when he arrives," she reflected, unaware that Madeline had laid down her weapons and retired from the field. "If I can help it she shall not gain the mastery. I can and will resume my old sway over him, teach him to love me better than his life, then give myself to him. If he has avoided me sedulously of late, it is only because he knows and dreads my power."

Such an opportunity of winning Gervase Talbot back was not to be neglected after his return to England. Lady Roscoe had lost little time in conveying her congratulations to him upon his marvellous escape and reappearance in society, hinting delicately that he would be a welcome visitor whenever he chose to call upon her in the seclusion entailed by her recent widowhood.

He had responded very coldly to this overture, however, and when they met the utter want of passion and embarrassment in his manner wounded both her love and her vanity.

No veiled allusions—half playful, half tender, on her part—do the past could induce Gervase Talbot to revert to it.

He seemed bent upon ignoring it altogether. When she emerged from her seclusion and entered the gay world again he had refused her invitations, and generally shown himself desirous of avoiding her.

The spell was evidently broken; he was no longer her slave. How had this come about?

She knew that he was no longer engaged to Madeline Vernon; that, for some reason which had not transpired, their marriage had fallen through. What prevented him, then, from wooing and winning her?

Their original positions had been reversed. The more indifferent and cold he seemed to her the fiercer grew her longing to win his love, to bring him to her feet.

What availed her beauty and her wealth if they could not gain for her the joy she coveted so intensely?

Gervase Talbot, the first feeling of surprise and annoyance at encountering both Madeline and Gladys under the same roof over, bore himself very circumspectly.

He had long ceased to importune Madeline to change her decision concerning him, and his manner towards her was purely conventional.

He was not on bad terms with Joshua Vernon. That old gentleman, though incensed against him when the revelation took place, had veered round of late and sided with Gervase, since Madeline seemed to him unreasonably obstinate and unyielding in her attitude.

Lady Roscoe grew furious as she failed to make any headway with the artist.

With his perfect courtesy of demeanour was blended an icy reserve through which she, with all her tact and charm, could not penetrate.

He was impervious to her advances; her presence, her words, her looks had no effect upon him, and the knowledge drove the proud woman frantic.

Madeline was seated by herself in the library one evening, so absorbed in a new and cleverly-written novel that she had failed to notice the first dressing-bell.

She looked up with a nervous start, however, as a familiar footstep approached the library door.

She knew it to be Gervase Talbot's, and thus far she had succeeded in avoiding a tête-à-tête with him.

She did not wish to meet him there alone, yet it was too late to escape.

She glanced hastily at the deep mullioned windows, with their wide cushioned seats, forming a small recess, shut in by the heavy crimson curtains drawn in front of them.

Gervase Talbot could not intend to remain long in the library, since it was so near the dinner hour.

Perhaps he had only come in search of a volume, or to return one. Ere he could detect her presence she had lifted one of the curtains and slipped into the window recess in order to avoid him.

Gervase Talbot, his fair, massive, manly beauty showing to advantage in well-made dress clothes, those garments which make a dark man look positively inky, a fragrant narcissus in his button-hole, went to the bookshelves, and, to Madeline's dismay, began leisurely to examine their contents.

"Why he is actually dressed!" she thought. "He won't hurry, and I can't make my escape until he goes. I shall be late for dinner. If only—"

Looking cautiously out from her coign of vantage, Madeline saw Lady Roscoe enter the library, and approach Gervase.

The girl's heart beat furiously. Was she to be the unwilling witness of a love scene between these two? Oh, if she could but escape!

She had never seen Gladys, Lady Roscoe, look more radiantly beautiful. Gowned in amber silk that fell in long sweeping folds and curves around her supple, splendid form, her golden hair piled high on the proud, stately head, the Roscoe diamonds gleaming and scintillating on snowy breast and arms, forming sparks of light in the small, shell-like ears,

encrusting even her fan and the little amber satin slippers she wore, her eyes the colour of purple pansies, glowing with deep feverish burning lustre, her loveliness seemed actually to dazzle the unseen beholder, to set Madeline's heart aching afresh.

"I want to know," she said deliberately, almost defiantly, as she stood there facing Gervase Talbot, "how long this farce is to go on?"

He regarded her coldly, steadily.

"To what does Lady Roscoe allude?"

"Need you ask?" she demanded, with rising passion. "Did you leave your memory behind you, Gervase Talbot, at that horrible place to which your cousin banished you? Have you forgotten the declaration of love made on the very night of your disappearance, the fervid avowal your lips breathed then of undying devotion? Have you forgotten how you implored me then to be your wife? What have I done that you should treat me as if I were a mere ordinary acquaintance?"

"Had you any intention, however remote, of accepting me when I made that avowal, and besought you to become my wife," asked Gervase Talbot, quietly, his pulses in no wise stirred by her beauty or her anger.

Her eyes fell beneath the searching glance in his.

She made no reply.

"I think not," he continued, "or you would hardly have consented to marry another, and a far richer man, while my fate was still in uncertainty. You deceived me with regard to Lord Roscoe. You had made your mind up to accept him ere we parted. The news of your marriage served to complete my disillusion, but it had commenced before then. Since you have asked for the truth, you shall have it."

She shivered involuntarily. A look of mute, wistful entreaty crossed her proud, beautiful face. Was it possible that he had hardened his heart against her?

"I never loved you," Gervase Talbot went on, clearly and incisively. "The feeling, the infatuation with which you inspired me cannot be called by that name. I think upon the occasion of our first meeting you must have perceived that I disapproved of you and your craving for universal homage. This touched your vanity, and you determined to subjugate me at any cost."

"Well, you succeeded. You captivated my senses for awhile, if you failed to touch my heart. For your sake I wavered in my allegiance to the pure, noble-minded girl, who loved and trusted me so implicitly, and whom I was engaged to marry. I do not blame you for this and my subsequent suffering, however. I only blame my own weak folly in yielding to the charm that rendered you irresistible—then. Your victory has cost me dear, Lady Roscoe. It has hindered my marriage with the loyal-hearted, constant woman I never really ceased to love. Those passages between us—the pastime of an idle hour to you—revealed to Miss Vernon in a long-delayed letter, written by me in a moment of frenzy, put an end to our contemplated union, and effectually destroyed my happiness."

His words stabbed her to the heart. Selfish, worldly as she was by nature, proving all too clearly that he had never really loved her, while she had yielded herself up to him unconditionally, all she yearned for at that moment was to become his.

"You wrong me!" she said, proudly. "I was not playing with you, Gervase Talbot. I loved you then, and now, but I feared poverty both for you and myself, hence my marriage. Yet you turn from me when all obstacles have been removed between us, when I have humiliated myself to the extent of supplicating your love, for the sake of a woman too proud and cold-hearted to forgive your sin! What is there I would not pardon if you asked me to do so? Why, her love for you cannot bear comparison with mine, and yet you spurn it. Gervase, be merciful! I, too, have suffered. Do not send me from you!"

Her voice died away in a wail of anguish, her lovely face sought his imploring in search of some sign of relenting. But the strings of his nature no longer responded to her touch. She had lost her power to sway him as of old.

"We have both been to blame," he said, quietly. "I more especially. Lady Roscoe, after what I have just confided to you it only remains for us to part. Your revelation can but add to my self-reproach. I will leave Fernbrook Abbey to-morrow. I owe this to you."

The beautiful, desolate woman drew herself up with a superb gesture of scorn and bitter defiant resolve.

"Your departure is unnecessary," she said, a little steely laugh ringing through the library. "I leave the Abbey myself to-morrow. You need not take refuge in flight in order to avoid me. I shall never appeal to you again after to-day. Our original roles are reversed. It is I who plead now—and plead in vain. I staked my happiness upon your love, and it has failed me."

The passion, the despair in her voice, evoked a momentary thrill of pity within his breast, without shaking his firm resolve.

"Gladys," he said earnestly, "this wrong done was mutual. At least, let us forgive one another ere we part?"

But she had quitted the library, carrying her fierce disappointment with her. The man she had first played with, and ended by loving idolatrously, had cast her off in what might have been her hour of supreme triumph.

A sob proceeding from the other side of the crimson curtains startled Gervase Talbot, standing there alone. Crossing the room hastily he tore them open.

"Madeline!" he exclaimed.

"I was not eavesdropping," she said, hurriedly, her face the colour of the curtains. "I was reading when I heard you coming, and I slipped into the recess to wait till you were gone. Then Lady Roscoe came in, and I could not reveal my presence. I—I am very sorry, Gervase!"

That was a fib. How could she feel sorry when her heart was dancing with joy at such a proof of the reality of his love for her as she had just received—proof strong enough to sweep away all her torturing doubts and suspicions?

"Madeline!" he cried, seizing her hands. "Am I never to be forgiven by you? Has even this painful scene failed to convince you of my love and repentance? You who are so merciful to others, will you make me the sole exception? Must that brief madness of mine for ever keep us apart?"

She raised her dark lustrous eyes to his.

"I forgave you long ago," she said, gently. "What more would you have?"

"Everything—your love, your promise to become my wife. Madeline, darling, I cannot live without you! My future happiness depends entirely upon your decision. Does not your own heart seek to convince you that mine is wholly yours—never to wander again?"

"Yes!" was the whispered reply, her face hidden upon his breast. "I have regained my faith in you, Gervase, and I know that you will not abuse it, dear! It shall be as you wish, while no word of mine will ever recall the shadows that haunt the past."

He lifted that sweet face gently, his own radiant with the light of a great joy, and their lips met in a long, hungry, forgiving kiss.

Lady Roscoe read the announcement of their marriage in the "Times," and it did not exactly meet with her approval.

Percy Dennison, engaged in floating bogus companies of the limited liability order in town, and Horace Fielding, sojourning at Boulogne, owing to a scarcity of funds, enjoyed the same privilege, which neither, by the way, seemed fully to appreciate, perhaps because they were not invited to be present at the ceremony.

[THE END.]

Facetiæ

Sue: "I'll never marry a man whose fortune hasn't at least five ciphers in it." He (exultingly): "Oh, darling, mine's all ciphers."

MUCH has been said about feats of strength, but it is an actual fact that a man of but ordinary stature recently knocked down an elephant. The performer of this great feat was an auctioneer.

ONE of our school teachers was endeavouring to explain to a small boy in her class the meaning of the word "collision." She said, "Suppose two boys running in the street should come together real hard, what would there be?" "A fight," responded the little fellow, loudly, and with astonishing promptness. The teacher gave it up.

"SAY, grandma, do people always paint the devil with red clothes on because he is wicked, and has evil spirits near him all the time?" "Yes, dearie; red is the colour of wickedness and sin." "Well, then, is it because grandpa has had spirits near him that his nose has got so red?" And grandma suddenly commenced to knit, and said she didn't know.

"Who is that?" he asked, nervously, as he heard a footstep in the hall. "Only papa," she whispered. He moved about uneasily. "Don't be afraid," she murmured, "you can surely trust papa." "I don't know," he said, doubtfully. "Oh, Arthur," she cried, throwing her arms about his neck appealingly, "you certainly ought to; nobody else in town will."

MRS. GREEN (to young physician, whom she has called in haste): "Oh, doctor, doctor! I fear you have made a terrible mistake! My daughter had that prescription, which you sent her last night, filled, and took a dose of the medicine. Now she exhibits every symptom of poisoning. Oh——" Young Physician: "Prescription, madam? Why, that was an offer of marriage!"

"Good morning, doctor." "Hallo, Satterlee; you look worried. What's the matter?" "Oh, my daughter's just home from college, and——" "Ah, these colleges! They're playing the deuce with our girls. What is it, overwork, eyes used up? Hope 'tisn't spinal curve——" "Oh, no, doc; nothing of the kind. But here, she's only seventeen years old, and she's got——views!"

"No," says Mrs. Sharp to her husband, "you cannot fool me; it was one o'clock this morning when you came home." "Now, Mary, it was surely not later than twelve o'clock." "I say no; for I was awake when you came, and I looked at my watch, and it was just one o'clock." "Well, all right, Mary, if you believe your old nickel-plated, two-and-evenpenny watch more than you do me, I have nothing farther to say."

A GENTLEMAN wishing to help a young friend of his who had lately been ordained, asked the clergyman of the parish to lend the young deacon his pulpit for a Sunday. "No, my dear sir," said the parson; "he may preach better than I do, and then my congregation will be dissatisfied with me." "But he may not preach as well as you do." "Then," emphatically responded the other, "he is not fit to preach at all."

IT WAS not on any of the New England railroads that Artemus Ward once remarked while the conductor was punching his ticket: "Does this railroad company allow passengers to give it advice, if they do so in a respectful manner?" The conductor replied in gruff tones that he guessed so. "Well," Artemus went on, "it occurred to me it would be well to detach the cow-catcher from in front of the engine, and hitch it to the rear of the train. For, you see, we are not liable to overtake a cow; but what's to prevent a cow strolling into this car and biting a passenger?"

MISS COLUMBIA BUNCOMB (aged forty): "Such a delightful voyage home to New York! I was the guest of the captain's wife, and was not obliged to pay a cent." Miss Cutting: "Ahem! There is no import duty, I believe, on antiquities!"

VISITOR: "Can I see Mrs. Whitelie?" Slavey: "No, ma'am, you can't, for she's out." "Out! Why, I saw her at the window." "Yes, ma'am; but there's different sorts of 'outs,' and missis is out at elbows, and hasn't got a dress fit to receive company in."

JOACHIM, the musician, was having his hair cut, and strenuously insisted that it should not be very short. "Well, sir," said the barber, losing patience, "if you, as a gentleman, don't mind being taken for a foreign musician, I'm sure I don't care."

A SENSIBLE FASHION.—Rural Aunty: "What in the world is that thing?" City Niece: "That's my upright piano." "Piano?" "Yes. It's draped in the new fashion—completely hidden, you know." "Oh! Well, that's sensible. Can't be seen or heard, can it?"

"BUCKLE my shoe, Egbert," said a belle to her near-sighted fiancé. Egbert went down on his knee like a true knight, but, as he had lost his eyeglass, his vision was a little uncertain. "Is this your foot, darling?" he inquired. "Yes." "Aw, pawdon—I—thought it was the lounge." Egbert is now disengaged.

HE: "I never saw anything like this tide. Here I've been putting steadily for ten minutes, and we don't seem to have moved a foot." She (after a pause): "Oh, Mr. Stroker, I've just thought of something! The anchor fell overboard a short time ago, and I forgot to tell you. Do you suppose it could have caught on something?"

LANDLADY (starting the conversation): "How absurd the ancients were, when we think of it. They actually believed that the souls of the dead entered birds and animals." A Brutal Boarder: "Nothing absurd about that. Take this chicken we are eating, for instance. It was probably inhabited by the sole of a shoe."

"PAT," said a manager to one of his workmen, "you must be an early riser. I always find you at work the first thing in the morning." "Indade, and Oi am, sor. It's a family trait, Oi'm thinking." "Then your father is an early riser, too?" "Me father, is it? He rises that early that if he went to bed a little later he'd meet himself getting up in the mornin'."

COUNTRY BRIDE (in draper's): "I want to look at some summer silks." Clerk: "Yes, ma'am. We have them in all shades—elephant's breath, London smoke, Browning's muse, animal fat, shrimp pink, onion gin, pug's nose, copper-red—all the latest styles, ma'am, and warranted to wash." Country Bride: "Oh, I don't want anything fancy. Show me a plain red an' yellor plaid."

A DEFINITION given by a well-known public speaker, in an address to children.—"Now, children," he said, "I propose to give you on the present occasion an epitome of the life of St. Paul. Perhaps some of you are too young to understand what the word 'epitome' means. 'Epitome,' children, is, in its signification, synonymous with synopsis." Having made this simple and clear explanation to the children the speaker went on with his story.

A STORY is told of Byron's wretchedness when his play, "Dearest than Life," was produced. At the end of the second act there was a long delay, and the audience grew very impatient. "What in the name of goodness are they doing?" asked a critic of the author. "I don't know," moaned Byron. At this moment the sound of a saw at work behind the curtain could be distinctly heard. "What are they doing now, my dear Byron?" asked the critic. Here the author's keen sense of humour came to the rescue. "I think," he said, "they must be cutting out the last act."

HEARD IN SOCIETY.—He: "I beg your pardon, miss, but I don't admire your last name." She: "Great heavens, man! Haven't I done everything in my power to change it? Must I knock a man down with a club?"

ENTHUSIASTIC professor of physics (discussing the organic and inorganic kingdoms): "Now, if I should shut my eyes—so—and drop my head—so—and should not move, you would say I was a clod. But I move, I leap, I run, I hop—then what do you call me?" Voice from the rear: "A clod-hopper." Class is dismissed.

JUDGE: "Among other things, you are convicted of having pocketed the silver sugar tongs at Frau Von Strehlen's. What explanation have you to offer?" Prisoner (a professional pickpocket, with a chivalrous bow to lady in the witness-box): "I only desired to compel the lady to help me to the sugar with her dainty, rosy fingers."

THE TRAMP'S REVENGE.—Sour-faced Woman: "You get right out of here or I'll call my husband." Tramp: "Y'r husband ain't at home." Sour-faced Woman: "How do you know he ain't?" Tramp: "I've allers noticed, mum, that w'en a man is married to a woman wot looks like you he never is at home except at meal time."

"WHY, Jimmy," said one professional beggar to another, "are you going to knock off already? It's only two o'clock." "No, you mutton-head," responded the other, who was engaged in unbuckling his wooden leg; "I'm only going to put it on the other knee. You don't suppose a fellow can beg all day on the same leg, do you?"

A LAWYER caught a tramp in his office stealing some law books, which the latter intended to pawn. Seizing the intruder by the collar the lawyer exclaimed: "You scoundrel! I'll have you tried and sent to the penitentiary." "Let go my neck, Colonel. If you are going to have me tried, I suppose I'd better engage you as my lawyer, as you have the luck to be on hand."

A MASCULINE BOOK.—A story is told at the expense of Professor Zarth, the efficient director of the Mænnerchor and Professor of German at the Utica Academy. "What is the gender of the book?" was the query to a student who persisted using the masculine "der" before the word. "It is masculine," replied the student. "You are mistaken. It is neuter," urged the professor. "Who ever heard of a masculine book?" "Why," rejoined the student, "I have lots of times, and so have you." "Never," said the professor. "What kind of a book is masculine?" "Hymn book," muttered the student, as an audible titter went round the class.

MOTHER: "And so you engaged yourself to that young man at Idelwilde Springs, did you?" Daughter (sheepishly): "Y-e-s, ma. I promised to become his wife." "It was on a beautiful moonlight evening in June." "Why, yes, ma; how did you know?" "And the hotel band was playing a delightful waltz by Strauss." "Why, yes. Who told you?" "And you two were in the arbour on the lawn." "Yes." "And the fountain sparkled in the moonlight, and made music which seemed like a fairy echo to the sweet melody which floated out from the distant orchestra." "Yes, how——" "And the lake, with its fleet of pretty boats gliding about the softly illuminated waters, seemed like a bit of lovely Venice dreaming at your feet." "Yes, yes. But how did you know all this?" "I knew it must have been under some such combination of circumstances that he proposed, or you would never have said 'yes' to such an addle-pated nincompoop as that."

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EILEEN'S ROMANCE

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

Author of "Vernon's Destiny," "Ivy's Peril," "Royal's Promise," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the prologue we are introduced to Lady Helen Percy, who is alone in her boudoir, playing with her little son, when she is startled by the unceremonious entrance of a woman who turns out to be the first wife of her husband. The shock was too much for Lady Helen, and although she lingered for some months, never recovered. Henceforward, John Percy, the millionaire is dead to the world, and only cares for the son she left behind her.

Lacy Courtenay is engaged to Alan Ernescliff, and both families heartily approve of the match. They are spending August at Boulogne. Among other visitors are Mr. Desmond and his two daughters, Maude and Eileen.

Bob Ernescliff has fallen desperately in love with Maude Desmond, and takes his friend Basil Courtenay into his confidence. While on the sands one morning Eileen strays beyond her depth, and is in danger of drowning, when Basil rescues her, an incident that has far-reaching effects for him.

Mr. Desmond has now become Lord Desmond, through the death of his father, and they have taken up their residence at Desmondville, Yorkshire. Maude Desmond does all she can to suppress her sister Eileen. Lord Desmond is too weak to interfere. There is living at the lodge at the gates of Desmondville a Mrs. Venn, who pays for the privilege, and it is evident has an object in so doing.

CHAPTER VI.

NEVER was preconceived idea of a stranger more mistaken than proved Eileen's fancy portrait of Henry Marsden, her father's creditor, and possibly the intruder expelled years before from Desmondville. Eileen had imagined him a rough, ill-mannered man—loud-voiced and offensive in face and gesture. Her astonishment was great when Lord Desmond presented to her a tall, slim, thin figure, clad in irreproachable broadcloth, whose hands were as white and shapely as her father's, and whose easy bearing and courteous smile were utterly unlike her expectations.

But for that terrible revelation Eileen might have fancied Mr. Marsden some old friend and boon companion of Lord Desmond's youth, who had suddenly claimed a few days' hospitality.

It was difficult to believe he was only here to exact a debt. And then the girl's bewildered thoughts had to be banished as she replied to the introduction, and seeing Mr. Marsden's hand ready was obliged, perforce, to offer her own.

She noticed then that his eyes steadily avoided hers. Whether it was some actual defect of vision or merely habit. Mr. Marsden never looked the person he spoke to in the face.

Eileen remarked, as she grew to know him better, that this was one of his most striking peculiarities. He would watch anyone most stealthily when unobserved, as though he wished to read their inmost thoughts; but he never by any chance suffered his eyes to meet theirs. For the rest he was not bad-looking. He was dark, and his skin had an olive tint rarely seen in England; his eyes were black, and very prominent; his teeth of a marvellous whiteness, while his nose had just sufficient of a hook about it to inspire the idea of Jewish origin.

Eileen did not notice all this at their first meeting. Indeed, her chief thought was relief. She had expected a guest deficient in even the A, B, C of refined society. She had yet to learn, poor child, the rough blustering creditor for whom she had been prepared, might, after all, have proved less dangerous than this crafty man of the world, with his polished address and outward courtesy.

She had but a moment of his company before he was carried off by his host to dress for dinner. It seemed to Eileen his toilet must have been rapid, so soon did he return to the drawing-room. Lord Desmond never hurried, so they were perforce tête-à-tête.

"Did you have a pleasant journey?" asked the girl, feeling herself bound to talk, and yet knowing of no subject suitable, and longing the while to tell him that though to pay a thousand pounds was simply impossible, she would strain every nerve to pay a portion of the debt if he would only go away and leave them in peace.

"Dull enough!" returned Mr. Marsden; "but luckily not a very long one. I only came from York."

"I thought I had heard you lived in London?"

"I don't live anywhere, my dear young lady. It is only noblemen with ancestral homes who care," he said, "to 'live.' I have chambers in the Temple; but I am rarely six months in one place. My life is a busy one, and I have no one belonging to me to induce me to settle down."

She winced at the allusion to noblemen's ancestral seats, which was precisely what he intended.

"I am very fond of Yorkshire," said Eileen, slowly. "When I lived at Boulogne I was always wishing to come to England; but I never knew how beautiful it really was!"

"Boulogne is a nice place," said Marsden, affably; "in fact, I should prefer it to Yorkshire. I think you were there some years, Miss Desmond?"

"Fifteen," said Eileen, simply. "Indeed, France is my native country. I was born in Normandy."

Mr. Marsden shook his head.

"That's a mistake, I assure you. You must claim Germany, and not France, as your native land, Miss Desmond. You were born at Hamburg."

"How can you possibly know?"

"I was staying there at the time. Indeed, it was the year of your birth which introduced me to your father. Desmond was a famous fellow in those days, and we soon became fast friends."

An impression seized Eileen that he was deceiving her. It had been impressed on her from childhood that she was born in Normandy.

Her father had a marked dislike to anything German—declared always nothing would induce him even to visit any part of the great empire. It seemed perfectly incredible that he should actually have spent a month at Hamburg. She was not skilled at concealment. Marsden, who was watching her closely, read her thoughts.

"You doubt me, Miss Desmond. Ask your father if I am mistaken; or, rather, do not ask him, for the memory of those German days is very painful to him. Even now he would gladly forget them."

"Did my mother die there?"

Marsden shook his head.

"She died in Normandy, where your father removed very soon after"—he paused, and then added, rather tamely—"your arrival in this lower world."

"And you have known papa eighteen years! How strange I never heard of you until to-day?"

"Not in the least. People rarely speak of those connected with painful subjects; and, perhaps, I need not tell you there was a discordant element in my intercourse with your father."

"He told me he owed you a thousand pounds," said Eileen, bluntly, "and that unless he paid it in a month he would be ruined. Mr. Marsden, if I could get the money for you by working my fingers to the bone, you should be paid in full; but we are poor—poorer far

than many cottagers, and there is no way of raising even a quarter of the debt. If you have no mercy you will have to do your worst. It is not that we will not pay you, but simply that we cannot."

Marsden advanced a step nearer. She stood with clasped hands, the flush of excitement on her cheeks, her eyes bright with eagerness—the very picture of a creature terribly in earnest.

He had seen many a professional beauty, but he had never admired any woman as he did this slight, helpless girl, who owned her father's fate was completely in his power, and yet made no appeal to him for pity; but just stated the simple truth—they could not pay.

"Miss Desmond," said the stranger, smoothly, "I think you do me a great injustice; but it is possible your father may have represented me in a false light. It is true, unfortunately, that there have been pecuniary transactions between us, and that Lord Desmond is my debtor to a large amount. I have asked him for a settlement—a fair statement of what I may expect; but I never dreamed of his troubling you in the matter. I should be glad of the money, I confess, but I would rather sacrifice my remaining capital than receive a sixpence that had been won by toil of yours. Believe me, I am here not as your father's enemy, but his friend!"

"But he thinks you mean to ruin him—he said so."

"Men often use strong language. I wrote to Lord Desmond it was time something was settled, and that I should like to come here and talk things over, but I never put such a word as 'ruin' in my letter."

"And you will be merciful?"

Again his eyes did not meet hers. He looked on the ground as he said, in his soft, modulated tones:—

"I promise you, Miss Desmond, I will never ask your father for anything not in his power to bestow. I will never urge my claim upon him if he treats me fairly, and I will do my utmost to ensure his comfort and prosperity."

"How good of you!" The sweet violet eyes were raised to his face through a mist of tears. "And do you know I have been thinking you an enemy."

"Never think so again."

Lord Desmond appeared, and Tony announced dinner. Eileen sat opposite her father, and tried to realise her need for anxiety was over; but, strange perversity, though she had the creditor's own word he did not mean to be obdurate, she could not feel at ease. It was difficult for her to attend to the conversation, much less join in it. Her head ached with relentless force, and she was glad when the time came that she could make her escape.

"Send us Co-coe in, Eileen," said Lord Desmond, as she passed his chair. "I have a great deal to discuss with Mr. Marsden."

Eileen was but too thankful to be spared further exertion. She swallowed the cup of tea brought to her in the drawing-room, and crept into bed, fairly worn out in body and mind. It was the reaction that follows great excitement. She had gone through enough that day to try a stronger frame, and as she laid her poor weary head on the pillow the girl's last thought was that surely her father would no longer be angry at her refusal to write to Lady May when he knew Mr. Marsden did not mean to be obdurate.

Left alone in the dining-room, the guest drew his chair nearer to his host's, but for a little while neither of them spoke. Lord Desmond looked uneasy. Like all selfish men, he was at heart a coward. He might tyrannise over creatures weaker than himself, but he was desperately afraid of two people, and one of them was his so-called friend, Henry Marsden.

"Well?"

This monosyllable came from the guest. It was put in a half-inquiring, half-authoritative fashion. Lord Desmond drained off a glass of claret, and said, slowly:—



"WILL YOU LET THIS HAND OF YOURS BE THE GIFT ENTITLING ME TO SEEK YOUR FATHER'S INTERESTS AS MY OWN?"
SAID HENRY MARSDEN.

"What do you want?"

"Surely you have forgotten manners, my dear friend, during our long separation. That is not a polite question to put to your guest?"

"I can't stay to measure my words. I am in your power. I don't need you to tell me that a word from you can ruin me utterly. The question is, do you mean to speak it?"

"That depends entirely upon circumstances. It seems you have invented a charming fable concerning me, and told your daughter you owe me a thousand pounds."

"You are always writing to me for money," returned Lord Desmond. "You never named any special amount, but I believed if I could only raise a good round sum, you might take it and leave me in peace."

"My dear Lord Desmond, your ingenuity does you credit. I confess I think the bribe of a thousand pounds might have freed you from my present visit and future acquaintance had I received it before I reached Desmondville; but—"

"It might be raised," said Lord Desmond, whose belief in impossibilities was wonderful. "I could strain every nerve to get it if you would take it and go."

"I would have accepted your conditions gladly," said Mr. Marsden, "had you only suggested them before I entered your house; but I should not take five thousand now as the price of my silence!"

Lord Desmond looked bewildered.

"You are not likely to be tried," he returned, sarcastically. "Five thousand pounds is a bribe that won't come in your way from me, at any rate."

The guest smiled. He was a man who rarely showed ill-humour. He never forgot a grudge, but stored it memory, to be repaid with interest when convenient; but outwardly he seemed one of the most patient and long-suffering of mortals.

"Five thousand pounds means a good deal,"

he admitted, slowly; "but money is not everything."

"It will buy everything!"

"Not quite. You thought so, no doubt, at Hamburg, and you would hardly have risked—"

"Hush!" cried Desmond, growing white with fear. "Have you no mercy, no pity in your nature? Cannot you let that miserable affair rest now after all these years?"

"Have you forgotten it?"

"No," said the wretched man, slowly. "I have not; if to live as though with a sword suspended over one's head, if to be haunted by one never ceasing fear, if to see danger in every creature's face—if this be expiation, why then I have atoned for the past a hundred times, for this has been my portion ever since."

"My memory is equal to your own," returned Marsden; "in fact, it goes even further back. A year or more before that time at Hamburg, I was happy—if such a thing is possible. I had youth, strength, fair prospects. I was engaged to the purest, the loveliest creature on this earth. And you robbed me of her. From that moment I swore to be revenged on you!"

"It was not my fault," pleaded the miserable man. "We loved each other. She would never have married you!"

"She would have married me had you not stolen her heart away from me. When she entered your house as governess to your child she was my promised wife. I don't say she loved me as I did her, but she was a good girl. She would have kept her word. I was a clerk with two hundred a year; she was the portionless child of an officer. I suppose, according to your views, I was not her equal, but her friends considered it a suitable provision for her, and I loved her with my whole heart. What was the result? A few months after she accepted the situation I always hated, she married you, a worthless man of

the world, who could offer her only the wreck of a life, and the contempt and hatred of your fine relations. Noel Desmond, I believe firmly all that was good in me died when I lost her. I had but one thought, one desire—revenge!"

"I suppose it was hard on you," admitted Lord Desmond, grudgingly, "but you cannot deny she loved me. She would not have been happy away from me."

"Was she happy with you? Did not your extravagance and reckless habits rob her of the common comforts of life? Was not her heart broken by the cruel slights heaped on her by your kindred? I never saw her after your marriage, but I kept on the track. It was easy to become attached to a branch office in the very German town where you were staying. It was not difficult to scrape acquaintance with you, and in time become your favourite associate. I let you win my hard-earned money at cards, but all the time I was waiting and biding my time. Already I saw you in desperate need of money. I only needed to remark on two accomplishments you possessed to wonder that in your poverty you did not make use of them. Oh! I baited my hook skilfully, and I succeeded."

Most people must have pitied Noel Desmond; he winced at every fresh taunt as though each were a blow. He looked a hopeless, prematurely old, broken-down man, and yet he did not raise his voice to speak one word in his own defence—he simply could not.

"You were caught in the toils," went on Marsden, bitterly. "I had laid my plan well; you could not escape. The heir of an English barony was in danger of a felon's dock."

"It was for her," muttered Noel Desmond, brokenly. "You know it was for her."

"You thought so, but I believe you would have acted just the same had she not been in existence. Well, I had succeeded. You were in my power. You had been expelled from

the club on account of the marvellous knack you possessed of securing the king in your hand at *carté*. That was disgrace enough. No better-class Englishman would speak to you, and the Germans to a man cut you, but my vengeance was not complete."

"Have pity," urged Lord Desmond, brokenly, "have pity."

"None," was the inexorable reply. "Did you have pity when you devised the cruel scheme of robbing me of my hard-earned savings? Don't you know that but for the junior partner chancing to see the cheque you drew so skilfully, every penny of my little hoard would have gone into your pockets? He had his doubts—said nothing, like a wise man, but came round to me, the fatal paper in his hand. You may hold your head high, Lord Desmond, and boast of your descent from a long line of nobles; but there are two dark spots in your past history, and I can put my finger on them both. You were expelled from a fashionable club for card-sharping, and but for my foolish clemency you would have stood in a felon's dock on a charge of forgery."

Lord Desmond shivered. He looked round nervously, as though he feared the walls had ears.

"You need not be anxious," said Marsden, bitterly. "Your servants are far away in their own part of the house; your daughter is in bed. You and I are alone. You have evaded this matter long enough. To-night we will have it out, and call things by plain names."

"I can't see you are injured," said Lord Desmond, rallying. "After all, I never had a penny of your money!"

"I came over here and told my story to your father," interrupted Marsden. "He had me hunted from his door like a thief, but he would not deny the truth of my story. I showed him my proofs—those proofs I hold to this day."

"They can be of no use to you now," said his victim, eagerly. "No jury in the world would believe such a story after twenty years had passed."

Henry Marsden smiled.

"If you think so, if you indeed believe my proofs of no value, why are you so eager to get them into your possession? Why again and again have you asked me to put a price on them, even estimating them—if I am to judge by the story you told Miss Desmond—at a thousand pounds?"

"It would be bad for the girls if the story got abroad. No one would believe it, but yet it might cast a slur upon their name."

"Is your elder daughter married? The girl who has been away from her father's house as though the company of her step-mother was desecration?"

"No."

"Likely to be?"

"There is some talk of it. Maude is a beauty, and rather hard to please. She deserves a good position."

"And this little story will help her to one. I believe that same young banker is in England. No doubt his memory would go back twenty years, and confirm my story."

"I don't believe it," cried Lord Desmond, fairly roused. "He is a man, and not a fiend. I met him once, and instead of taunting me as you have done, he told me I had no need to fear him, and that he did not believe a creature in England knew my story but myself. He paid Maude a great deal of attention; I half hoped something would come of it."

Marsden smiled sardonically.

"His love would not stand the test, my dear fellow. Seeing he knew everything, how could you expect it?"

"It would have been a relief."

"Then you are disposed to part with your daughters—on advantageous terms, of course?"

"I shall be glad to see them married. I believe her mother's family would see to Maude, but Eileen has not a relation in the world. When I die this house and everything in it

goes to a stranger, and the child will be penniless."

"As her mother was before her. Helen was educated in a charity school, and taught to earn her own living as a governess. I don't suppose you have given her child even such help for her future."

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"I have always kept her with me."

"She is very fond of you?"

"Very," returned Lord Desmond, equably. "Eileen and I are just the world to each other."

"And people call life fair," said Marsden, scornfully. "What have you done to win the love of two such women? Your second wife worshipped you; I can see her child would lay down life itself for you. What have you done to merit it? You, whose days have been one long idleness, who never in your life did one stroke of honest work? I, who have toiled from boyhood, who have risen early and worked late; I, who have never owed a penny I could not pay, nor eaten a crust I had not earned, surely I am more deserving than you, yet no woman's love was ever mine? I have lived to forty-two without ever being necessary to another's happiness."

"I suppose that is your own fault. You might have married had you pleased."

"I suppose so; but the one creature I desired was stolen from me. I gave myself to work then—work and revenge. Well, both have prospered. I believe I am richer now than many men born to inherit fortunes, and my vengeance, if deferred, is sure."

Lord Desmond fidgeted uneasily.

"I wish you would say what you mean," he argued, querulously. "Let me understand what I have to expect? So much I have right to ask."

"I am not quite sure myself."

Lord Desmond stared.

"You hate me? Of course, I knew it before, but to-night you have put it in the plainest language. Well, seeing that you hate me, what pleasure can there be to you in staying in my house?"

Marsden smiled.

"Oh, I was born of the people, you know, and it may be an honour to me to have the power to say I visited a nobleman. Then I may have a love of antiquities, with which this region abounds."

"You do not deceive me. You are not the man to come to the north of Yorkshire in November without some special object; neither would you stay here unless it suited you."

"Spoken like a book," said Marsden, sarcastically. "Really, Lord Desmond, your knowledge of character does you credit. Know, then, I am here because it pleases myself, and I shall stay here so long as it continues to do so; but I will make you one promise—and I am a man of my word. Before I leave Desmondville I will tell you the terms on which I will give up those papers you know of, and on which I will also bind myself to keep your secret to my dying day."

Eileen went to bed, certain she should not sleep, but at eighteen Nature is very kind to our poor wearied bodies, and does not often let any trouble, however real, deprive them of the rest they need; so that the poor young daughter of the Desmonds enjoyed slumber as calm and refreshing as though she was not surrounded by a sea of troubles.

All things look brighter and fairer to us when seen in the morning light, and by the time she had finished dressing Eileen was quite cheerful.

Her father's anger and cruel proposal yesterday had been due to his anxiety.

Mr. Marsden had promised to ask no terms that could not be complied with, and seemed a gentlemanly person, easily entertained, so that the present trials were smoothed; and as for that other sorrow, more personal and keen, that Basil Courteney must marry an heiress, or break his parents' heart—well,

he must have known that when he asked Eileen to be his wife, and if he loved her well enough to think her poor little hand worth more than all the good things an heiress could bring, why, it would be ungrateful indeed for her to send him away. Besides, three years must pass before he claimed her! If his love stood that test, surely she might trust it to stand all time!

It was a lovely day. That much-maligned month, November, is not all fog and gloom. There are some days when the sun rivals October in its blue serenity, and the air is soft and balmy—no colder than makes one's cheeks glow and a walk delightful.

Dressed in her plain black serge, Eileen looked a different creature from the brilliant vision who had received Henry Marsden the night before; but though there was no one to tell her so, in her simple morning attire she was even more strikingly like her mother. The soft clinging woollen gown, the plain straw hat and big fur cape were just what Helen might have worn in the days when she was a pupil teacher at the institution for officers' daughters, and the fiancée of the young clerk.

As Henry Marsden, standing leaning against the gate, saw her come quietly down the drive a pang smote him—she looked so like his lost love.

He was not a good man. There were many dark pages in his life, but he had suffered much. He had staked his all on one prize, a woman's heart. That was stolen from him. He did not go "to the dogs," as the phrase is; he did not become dissolute, reckless, or a spendthrift.

Outwardly his character seemed little changed, but his moral nature had received a warp, from which it never recovered. He lived henceforward, as he told Lord Desmond, for two things—work and revenge.

From the moment he heard of his lost love's death he never gave a kindly thought to any creature, until now, long years after, he stood face to face with her child.

"You are out early, Miss Desmond?"

"I generally come for a walk before breakfast. I like to walk down here and meet the postman."

"Ah, you have a large correspondence, no doubt. Young ladies mostly have, and you must have left a great many girl-friends in France?"

"I never had a girl-friend in my life till I came here, and my one correspondent is my sister."

"And she is the girl-friend?"

"I never think of Maude as a girl," said Eileen, soberly. "She is so wise and prudent; though she looks just like a child, she is so tiny. My one friend is Lady May Delaval. She lives at the Court, the next place to this, but she is away now."

"And you were hoping for a letter from her?"

"I should like one," said Eileen, frankly, "but I don't expect it. Lady May is visiting, and having a very gay time."

"Shouldn't you like to go visiting and have a gay time?"

Eileen smiled.

"I did go to the Court once. I stayed four whole days, but I don't think it was good for me. I was dreadfully discontented when I came home."

Marsden smiled.

"It must be very dull for you."

"You see," said Eileen, practically, "being poor is very tiresome. Abroad I did not seem to mind. It was quite a natural thing, but here in this beautiful old house, and with rich people all round, one does think a little money would be nice!"

"A good deal would be nice."

"I should not care to be very rich," returned Eileen, quietly. "One would never get used to it. I should like to be able to pay

everyone—even you, Mr. Marsden—and to be able to keep a pony-carriage."

"You are very moderate. Most young ladies aspire to a great deal more. Jewels, horses, opera-box, diamonds, town house, and country mansion. They look on all as their right."

Eileen shook her head.

"Maude wants all those, and I think she would do credit to them; but I am different. She says I shall never be a proper young lady. Mr. Marsden, you said last night you had known papa more than eighteen years. Did you ever see my mother?"

"Why?"

"I don't know. Maude sneers at her, and it hurts me so. There is a strange old woman who lives at the Lodge who remembers mamma. She says she saw her married. She always speaks of her as an angel. I can't explain it to you, but it comforts me. I have no recollection of my mother, but I like to think of her as good and true."

"She was an angel," said Marsden, gravely. "I have seen her, and I assure you of that. Never believe one word against your mother. I knew her well, and I tell you she was a lady—a pure, unselfish soul. She had but one fault—her affections were stronger than ought else. She loved your father, and she married him against the entreaties of every friend she had."

"But it would not have been love if she had not!" said Eileen, slowly. "Love that would yield to other people's persuasions could not be worth much."

Marsden looked thoughtful.

"Who is the woman you were speaking of?" he asked, abruptly. "An old servant?"

"Oh, dear, no. She is more like a tenant than a servant. She came in my grandfather's time, and paid a heavy rent to be allowed to live in the Lodge. She is a great mystery to most people."

"Do you mean she is a lady?"

"No; but she is not a working person. She is very, very old—past eighty, and has plenty of money, yet she chooses to live in this lonely cottage, and actually opens the gates for people herself if her little maid is not about. She is quite an eyesore to my sister, who is always begging papa to get rid of her. Not that that is feasible, for we are too poor to give up fifty pounds a year."

"Is it possible you mean Mrs. Venn?"

"That is her name. How did you find it out?"

"Old Venn was a partner in the firm where I was a clerk for years. He married when he was turned sixty to the horror of his family. However, he was in his sound mind, so they could do nothing. Of course, they abused the bride plentifully. She was quite an old woman. Had been half over the world, and was said to have had a remarkable history."

"Did you know her?"

"I never spoke to her but once—I cannot give you the particulars. There was someone I knew in whom she took a great interest. She wanted to help this person with money, and feared, if offered in her own name, it would be refused."

"And did you help her?"

"I solved the difficulty by wrapping it up into a small parcel so carefully no one could discover the contents, and getting our porter to leave it at the house. I know Mrs. Venn was very grateful. How wonderful she should be living here!"

"Is she mad?"

"Not the least in the world. She is eccentric. I think she did a cruel wrong to someone in her younger days, and has been striving ever since to put it right. It's a strange thing to say of anyone in this nineteenth century, but I think it's true."

"Would you like to come with me to see her?"

"By no means. I have no real acquaintance with her. She left Germany on old Venn's death, and I have never met her since."

"And the person she tried to help; did they get the money? Was it of use?"

His lip curled.

"The wife for whose sake it had been sent, and who was dying slowly of privation never saw it. The husband squandered it that very night at *écarte*."

Eileen shuddered.

"How awful!"

They walked back to the house together, and Eileen decided her enforced guest was a quiet, pleasant-spoken man.

How he possibly could have been induced to lend her father a thousand pounds still seemed a mystery, and how he was to be repaid continued a problem; but he had promised not to use hard measures, and so poor Eileen strove to be content, and to dismiss the subject from her mind.

A week passed on, and Mr. Marsden continued at Desmondville, nor had anything been said respecting his departure.

He was not a troublesome guest, and in spite of Lord Desmond's grand preparations for his comfort, seemed easily pleased.

He often met Eileen in her early morning walk. From breakfast to lunch he was shut up in his own sitting-room writing; in the afternoon he was again on her hands. And the strangest thing about him was that, though professedly Lord Desmond's friend and visitor, he never seemed to seek his companionship or society.

"Do you think Mr. Marsden will stay much longer?" asked Eileen one morning, while she was alone with her father.

It was astonishing how rare their tête-à-têtes had become of late. It almost seemed to the poor child that Lord Desmond purposely avoided her. Since her refusal to write and ask May Delaval for money he had never recovered his old fondness for her company. He was kind and affectionate to her before their guest, but in private he rarely spoke.

He looked up irritably.

"I can't send him away, child. Why should you mind his being here? He seems quiet and inoffensive!"

The girl put one arm round her father's neck. Eileen had all a child's caressing grace of manner.

"Papa, why are you so vexed with me? I never asked you to send Mr. Marsden away. I only wanted to know how long he was likely to stay."

"I have no idea."

"Do you think it will be another week?"

"I don't know."

"Is he waiting for the money?"

"Why—has he said anything to you?"

"Not since the first night he came. He said then he would never press you hardly, or ask for anything you could not bestow."

Lord Desmond's brow cleared as by magic.

"Did he really say that?"

"Yes; and I think he meant it."

"He always means what he says. You are quite sure he said that, word for word?"

"Quite sure."

"Heaven bless you, child! You don't know the load you have taken from my mind."

"But, papa, didn't he speak to you about it?"

"He only said before he left he would propose terms. How could I tell they would be such as I could meet?"

Tony put his head in at this moment. An old servant, he did not stand on ceremony.

"Miss Eileen, there's Mrs. Venn's little maid come up in a great taking. She says her mistress wants to see you right away."

"Impertinence!" muttered Lord Desmond, irritably, but Eileen rose at once.

"Mrs. Venn would not send such a message as that without some good reason. I will go down to the Lodge at once. I feel sure something must be the matter."

But even Eileen felt indignant when she found all as usual at the South Lodge, and Mrs. Venn, a picture of comfort, sitting by

the fire peeling apples. She felt as if she had been deceived there on false pretences, and said so, frankly.

"I'm well enough," said Mrs. Venn. "I never sent word I was ill. I wanted to see you right away. That was the message. Perhaps that stupid girl altered it."

Eileen confessed it had been delivered verbatim, and, remembering Mrs. Venn's age, soon recovered her good temper. Sitting down by her hostess she asked what was the real cause of her summons.

"Is it true that Henry Marsden is staying with you?"

"Quite true. He would have come to see you, but he thought you might not care about a visit."

"I don't want to see him. He told you he knew me, then? It must be many a year since he saw me."

"Yes. He said he met you in Germany."

Mrs. Venn returned to the charge.

"Why is he staying with you?"

"Really," said Eileen, drawing herself up, haughtily, "we have a right to choose our own guests!"

"Your father's given up the right if he's asked Henry Marsden to break bread with him. Why, child, they are sworn foes! Never was a more bitter hatred than that young Marsden felt for him. Child, child, be careful! Men don't change their natures. If ever two hated each other those two did, and if it pleases them to seem friends there's some ill reason for it."

"Hush!" said Eileen. "I will hear nothing against my father. You ought not to try to make me!"

"I don't!" said the old woman, stoutly.

"I'm eighty turned, and I know life better than you do. I sent for you to warn you. No good can come of any intimacy between your father and Marsden."

"Is he so wicked?"

"Young Marsden?" forgetting he was forty-two. "No. He is no worse than other people; but he has bitter cause to hate your father! Oh! child, don't trust him! Doubt him even when he speaks fairest! Avoid him as you would avoid a serpent! Shun him as though he had the pestilence!"

"He has never harmed me," said Eileen, quietly. "On the contrary, my father owes him a large sum of money; and he has been most kind and patient in waiting for it. I can't be ungrateful!"

Mrs. Venn looked troubled. Indeed, her face was so really sad that, in spite of Eileen's scorn of the warning, she believed thoroughly it was given in good faith.

"Listen!" said the old woman, suddenly.

"I've got eyes in my head, though I'm eighty turned. That young gentleman who stayed at the Court, and was always coming over to see your father—he no rode over so often with Lady May—ain't he your lover?"

The crimson cheeks made all answer needless.

Mrs. Venn went on:

"He came over one day when you were at the Court. He rode through the gates as blithe and gay as a bird; an hour later he came back gloomy, grave, and silent. I may be turned eighty, but I know the world. Mr. Bask had been to ask Lord Desmond for his daughter, and been refused. Oh, I understood it all. Then you came back, quiet and sad, just like a little white ghost; and you were always down at the gate watching for the postman. Miss Eileen, I tell you I know it all as well as though you'd told me; and I beg you, for his sake, the sake of the man who loves you, beware of Henry Marsden!"

Eileen looked down then, and gobbled at though her very heart would break.

"Oh, my dearie!" said the old woman, with kind, if simple pity. "Oh, my dearie! here's a good gift, but it brings a many sorrows with

it. If you've fixed your heart on Mr. Courtenay, there's a deal of trouble in store for you; but take my warning—and Heaven grant I've given it in time!—beware of Henry Marsden!" Eileen dried her tears.

"If you would only speak plainly, so that I could understand! Even if you are right about my feelings, what has Mr. Marsden to do with them? Is he an enemy of Mr. Courtenay's?"

"He never saw him. My dear, I can't help you better. I've said my say. Maybe you'll take my advice, maybe not. Perhaps, too, I've given it too late; but I can't say any more. That's my last word—beware of Henry Marsden!"

Walking slowly homewards with this strange warning ringing in her ears, it was not pleasant to be suddenly brought face to face with the unconscious object of it.

Henry Marsden was coming straight towards her; she could not avoid meeting him without positive discourtesy.

They had often walked together before without her minding the companionship; but now, with the memory of Mrs. Venn's entreaties vividly before her, it was hard that Mr. Marsden should turn round and propose to accompany her to the house.

"Don't let me disturb your walk," she entreated; "you had only just come out."

"I only came out to find you."

A pause. Eileen felt uncomfortable without knowing why. Marsden went on.

"Do you remember the night of my arrival?"

"Perfectly!"

"I promised you then I would never be hard upon your father; that I would never ask him for anything not in his power to bestow."

"You have kept your word. You have been most kind!"

"Will you let me be kinder still? Eileen, will you give me the right to ask Lord Desmond for the only thing I want? Will you let this little hand of yours be the gift entitling me to seek his interests as my own?"

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,065. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

INSURED AGAINST SURGICAL OPERATIONS.

People of modest means are beginning to insure themselves against specialists. The plan is that subscribers who pay an annual fee shall be entitled either to free admittance to a hospital or nursing at home and a free operation or to a fixed sum paid down to defray the cost of an operation, if one becomes necessary. The cost of surgical repairs to the human body has become oppressively great to persons who just manage to pay their way. People who are obviously poor get a great deal of excellent surgical and medical treatment in hospitals and elsewhere for nothing, but for the next class above them a serious illness—especially if it involves an operation—is almost ruinous. It would seem as if the time was near when societies for insurance against specialists might be profitably organised. The specialists have come to be a very important—indeed, an indispensable—institution, especially to families in which there are children. The office of the family doctor has now become simplified to the task of coming in and telling the patient which specialist to go to. It is not that specialists charge too much, for their honourable services are above price. It is that landlord, butcher, baker, grocer, milkman, coalman, dentist, and trained nurse do not leave you money enough to pay them appropriately. To subscribe a considerable sum annually and have all the repairs and desirable improvements made in one's family without further disbursement would be a comparatively simple way out of a troublesome predicament.

Eat only food that is easy of digestion, avoiding indigestible dishes, and taking but one to three kinds at a meal.

Gems

THE man who lives for self is not missed when he dies.

A RIGHT judgment draws us a profit from all things we see.

CHEERFULNESS is like money well expended in charity; the more we dispense of it, the greater our possession.

PRUDENCE yields to circumstance, folly quarrels with it, pride defies it, wisdom uses it, and genius controls it.

WHEN a fellow starts to run through a fortune there are lots of other fellows who are willing to act as pace maker.

THE average wife imagines her husband would have remained a bachelor if he had not been fortunate enough to find her.

THIS ought to be our endeavour—to conquer ourselves, and daily to wax stronger and to make a further growth in holiness.

A CHARACTER which combines the love of enjoyment with the love of duty and the ability to perform it is the one whose unfoldings give the greatest promise of perfection.

THE fool maintains an error with the assurance of a man who can never be mistaken; the sensible man defends a truth with the circumspection of a man who may be mistaken.

A GOOD memory knows how to forget, a well-managed tongue knows how to keep still, disciplined ears know how to be deaf on occasion, and skilful hands can be idle if necessary. One half of knowledge consists in not knowing, one half of beneficial action in resting.

EQUINE INTELLIGENCE

There are people who deny that the horse is able to plot, to conceive, or reason. Some horses are duller than others, and some apparently are better equipped for thought than the men in charge of them. You teach a horse to start or stop at a word, and acts of kindness or cruelty are seldom forgotten by him. At a farm that we visit a little girl who has given sweetmeats to spirited animals can take the greatest liberties with them. The stranger has to keep a safe distance from their heels, while she may crawl between their legs. They remember her acts of kindness and carefully avoid doing anything to harm her.

We have in mind a stallion who was harshly punished. He treasured up the act of injustice, and the author of his humiliation was compelled to keep aloof from him. His manner plainly indicated that the man would get hurt if he ventured within striking distance. This stallion trusts those who have shown him consideration, and in the main is not a bad tempered horse. He appears vicious only to those who have treated him viciously. His knowledge of right and wrong suggests thought. It shows capacity to reason from cause to effect. Teach a horse as you would a child what to fear, and what to do, and the lesson will never be forgotten.

Some horses cunningly open their stable doors by removing pegs with their teeth, and thus put plan into operation. Their imagination is fired by beautiful scenery. Put one in a paddock where he can look out upon the hills, and hear the birds sing and you will quiet his nervous system. In moments of contemplation he has the dreamy look of a poet.

About the only time that a horse forgets to think is when he surreptitiously finds his way to the well filled oat bin. He then does not eat in a rational way, but gorges himself to the danger point. This is an unmistakable evidence of weakness. And yet there are men endowed with intellect who have little or no control over their appetites. Absence of restraint at the feast marks the development of the human as well as of the equine race. In our judgment, the horse sometimes thinks.

AN ANCIENT PRACTICE

Ovid tells us of a recipe which gives whiteness to the skin:—barley meal, lentils, eggs, stag horns, bulbs of Narcissus, gum and boney. The fashionable cosmetic during the time of the Empress Poppæa was a paste laid on the face, which formed a thick mask that the ladies wore at home, and was called "the husband's face."

Mr. C. A. Boettinger also gives a picture of that time in his German work published in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and translated in 1813 under the title of "Sabina, or a Morning in a Roman Lady's Dressing-room, at the End of the First Century of the Christian Era."

"At night, before retiring to rest, Sabina covered her face with a paste made of bread dipped in asses' milk, an invention of the Empress Poppæa. This coating dried during the night, so in the morning her head looked like a plaster one, covered with cracks. Added to that, in taking off her clothes the previous night, she laid aside many essential parts of her person, such as her eyebrows, teeth, hair, etc., so that she looks more like the head of a skeleton than a Venus of Praxiteles. All her servants had their particular function, and by their zeal sought to obtain a look of approbation from their mistress." As of old in Egypt, there were doctors for each part of the body—oralists, pedicures, dentists, oculists. There was also a slave for each vestment, each jewel, as well as for each part of the body, whose occupation was to clean and attend to it, and who were severely punished for the slightest negligence. These slaves were divided into small groups, who served Sabina one after the other, as she required. First came those carrying paint, applying the white and the rouge, then those combing the eyebrows, others cleaning and putting in teeth. Those slaves, though born in a Latin village, were given Greek names. They were discerned by the name of Cosmetics. One held a basin of warm asses' milk, and with a sponge gently took off the plaster from her mistress's cheek, which really was more like a poultice, a second cosmet applied the white and rouge, but before doing so breathed on a metal mirror, which she presented to Sabina, to show that her saliva was wholesome, perfumed, and worthy to crush the paint she was going to put on.

Boettinger gives an elaborate description full of details. How powdered lead diluted in water was put into a shell—from this the eyebrows were traced, how the false ivory teeth were placed in golden gums, how the nails were polished; all this is terribly long and would bore my readers.

"When the noble Sabina left her dressing-room she entered another; here an army of dressmakers and milliners waited with dresses and other articles of adornment." What Boettinger does not tell us is that there was a law that obliged all demi-mondaines to dye their black hair either red, blue, or yellow, or to wear a wig.

THE THREE STAGES

Down the rippling stream of life
Float the golden hours;
Children, leave your puny strife,
Come, and gather whilst ye may,
Lest too soon they pass away,
Crushed and faded flowers.

Down the rapid stream of life
Still bright hours remain;
Stalwart youth, or man, or wife,
Snatch a while from toil and care,
Whilst such hours are passing there;
Grasp—'tis thine the gain!

Down the torrent stream of fate
Moments flow as ever;
Dotard, 'tis for thee too late;
Golden hours are now to be
Only with eternity—
Or never!

Indigestion.

Mrs. Annie Splers, 104, Arley Road, Saltley, Birmingham, interviewed by a "Birmingham Telegram" reporter, said: "I am forty-two, and for a number of years I suffered from indigestion and biliousness. I had little appetite, and eating was followed by severe pain. As time went on, my complaints got worse; fearful pains tormented me, and I felt helpless and lifeless. I suffered much agony from pains in the shoulder-blades. I went to several doctors, and obtained medicine from the Dispensary, and was also for three months under treatment at Queen's Hospital, but all to no purpose. About this time my son persuaded me to take some Bile Beans. My appetite soon returned, and my spirits brightened, and after undergoing a proper course I was completely cured, and I am sure that it is due to Bile Beans that baby and myself are alive to-day, for the strength they gave me, undoubtedly enabled me to survive the ordeal when my baby was born."



"Eating was followed by severe pain."

TO PREVENT INFLUENZA AND COLDS.

You can easily do so if you go about it the right way and do not daily. Influenza only seizes upon those whose systems have become run down and weakened. Those who keep in the pink of condition snap their fingers at this winter scourge. Liver chills, colds, attacks of shivering, and similar ailments have one common origin, namely, the condition of the body. When the supply of energy is adequate, the pulse vigorous, the digestion good, colds and chills cannot get a hold. Once the vitality becomes lessened, the evils just named creep in. Bile Beans will keep the body in the "pink of condition." They act directly upon the liver, and that causes of so many ailments—constipation. They stimulate the circulation, improve the digestion, and increase the energy of the whole system. Women especially find them beneficial. Always remember that prevention of influenza and its allied ailments is better than cure, and that experience shows no preventive known equal to Bile Beans.

Bile Beans

FOR
Biliousness

Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for Headache, Influenza, Constipation, Piles, Liver Troubles, Bad Breath, Rheumatism, Colds, Liver Chills, Indigestion, Flatulence, Dizziness, Buzzing in the Head, Debility, Anemia, and all Female Ailments. Of all Chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Mfg. Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C., on receipt of price, 1/4 and 2/6 per box. **SAMPLE BOX FREE** on receipt of penny stamp (to cover return postage, if this paper is mentioned). Address—The Bile Bean Mfg. Co., Greek Street, Leeds.

Half-a-Guinea's worth for 6d. The "BILOSCOPE" and outfit (an advertising novelty) for producing lifelike pictures. Post free on receipt of 7 stamps. Address—The Bile Bean Mfg. Co., Box 428, Greek St., Leeds.

**ZAM-BUK
OINTMENT.**

CHARLES FORDE'S GREAT HERBAL REMEDY, "ZAM-BUK," for running sores, piles, cuts, burns, bruises, eczema, etc., 1/4 per box. Free Sample Box from the Proprietors, The Bile Bean Mfg. Co., Greek Street, Leeds, if 1d. stamp is sent to cover return postage.

THE SAME IN ALL WEATHER.

Oh, lassie with the sunny brow,
And bright and smiling eyes,
We gaze on thee when days are dark,
With wonder and surprise.
It seems so strange and sweet to find
A face without a cloud,
When all our sky is overcast,
And threatening winds are loud.

We bless thee for thy cheery ways,
Thy glad and winsome tone,
And would not change thy merry smile
For a queen upon her throne.
Our eyes may glance, when skies are clear,
And sorrows hide afar,
Upon some fairer, haughtier brow,
As on some distant star;

But for the daily walks of life,
With sun and shadow strown,
We bless the fate that led our path
So close beside thine own.
For in thy smile is sunny warmth,
Howe'er the winds may blow,
And in thy love a joyful peace
And rest but few may know.

A SIMPLE DEVICE.—By making a hole through a piece of paper or a card with a pin, moving the pin a few times round the hole to give it a smooth edge, holding the pin-hole close to the eye and looking at printed or other matter held at the normal reading distance, there is perfect definition, and anyone who requires to use glasses to read can, with this device, read anything. When a pin hole is held to both eyes at the same time, there is a great improvement over one, with perfect binocular effect. The field of view is much smaller than that seen when glasses are used. There is less light and no magnification. The importance and utility of this simple device in many circumstances is obvious.

Living Photographs

A 10s. 6d. Instrument for Sixpence

We have just received one of the neatest and most novel advertising mediums of the new century. It is an instrument called the Biloscope, which, by an arrangement of lenses, throws two photos into one in such a way as to give in a wonderful manner an appearance of life to the scene depicted. The Bile Bean Manufacturing Co. have, we are informed, just placed a mammoth order which will enable them to supply the public with an instrument at the unprecedented price of 6d., which gives results equal in every way to those obtained from 10s. 6d. instruments. This price also includes six genuine photos of interesting and varied subjects; while additional sets may be had post free for 14d. per set. The lenses in these Biloscopes are, in composition and manufacture, identically the same as those supplied for more expensive instruments, the only difference being that they are smaller. We are glad to inform our readers that they may obtain one of these novel instruments, post free, by forwarding sevenpence in stamps to Box 428, Bile Bean Manufacturing Co.'s Central Distributing Depot, Greek Street, Leeds (Yorks).

As a Christmas present, nothing could be more suitable. They are by no means toys, but provide for old and young interest and amusement for hours.

WOMEN WHOM MEN LIKE.

"No," said the spinster, with more than her usual acerbity, "men don't like intellectual women, they are too clear sighted, and refuse to deal in the flattery which masculine vanity craves. A pretty fool is far more to their taste, though I have known some remarkably plain fools absolutely adored by men. But these latter have kept this same sweet morsel as

flattery under the tongue (the only real rival beauty has); they have only asked the men to shut their eyes and take all they can get—and the men have found it delicious and come back again and again to ask for more, for one and all they are ruled by the love of being spoken comfortably to—otherwise, presented in a heroic or fascinating light to which they have no real pretensions. For it is the good-looking and silver-tongued fools who are the really clever ones of the earth, who get all that is worth having out of life, for whom the strong work their hearts out, well paid by a look, a phrase, a little of that beauty or honey for which man, the child, has always so great an appetite. He goes back comforted to the dust of the arena of life, determined to wrest from his fellows some bauble or dainty acceptable to the dear little fool who, all frills and smiles awaits his return—usually with some other men to help her pass the time agreeably, for lime a twig well and it will catch more birds than one; what pleases one good male judge generally pleases the whole sex. And it is natural enough that men should love the pretty silly creatures, who, whatever their lack of knowledge in other directions, completely understand them; for to study a man's little ways, his likes and his dislikes, his idiosyncrasies, and above all, his weaknesses, comes easily to the woman who is distracted by no claims of intellect or high principles, from the congenial task. She must be entirely destitute of humour, for a man fights shy of the woman who under any provocation will resort to satire or ridicule. The moment he discovers she regards him in an unheroic light her influence over him is gone, and he moves on until he finds the pretty fool he seeks, and having found her, gives her all the time and money he has at his disposal. Yes, all good things come to the good-looking or agreeable fool who knows how to wait—though usually the waiting is not prolonged."

A DESPERATE DEED

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Harold, Earl of Silverdale, is spending the Christmas holidays at Woodville Honour. His host, Sir Stuart Woodville, has twin daughters, Lillian and Marguerite, who bear such a striking resemblance to each other that a strange riddle is extremely difficult to distinguish between them. Marguerite has already a dark page in her young life (while Lillian has given her maiden confidence and love to the Earl, and a marriage is speedily arranged). The Earl and Countess of Silverdale are returning from their honeymoon, and, while staying in London for a few days, a telegram reaches the Earl, stating that his daughter Iva, by his first wife, has been injured in a fire. The Earl at once leaves for Belgium. During his absence Lillian agrees with Marguerite to return quietly to their Sussex home. They are detained on the way owing to an accident. Lillian is mistaken a second time for Marguerite by Reuben Garratt who holds her sister's secret. He had followed Lillian to her room at the hotel, and she, terrified at his threats, is powerless to say a word, when he fires, and she falls lifeless. Marguerite, finding the body a little later, takes in the situation at a glance, and determines that she, Marguerite Woodville, is dead, and that Lillian, Countess of Silverdale, still lives.

Marguerite's (as we will continue to call her) first interview with the Earl passes off successfully. Reuben Garratt, finding her an easy prey (but still believing her to be Lillian), determines to throw her child by Sir Geoffrey Damyn on her hands. Sir Geoffrey, to Marguerite's consternation, visits her husband. Sir Geoffrey is staggered by what he regards as the resemblance between Marguerite and Lillian. The Earl is greatly concerned at the strange behaviour of the Countess, and many things have happened to arouse his suspicions and to cause uneasiness.

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Continued).

Bareheaded, shaggy-coated, the lamplight, the wavering crimson firelight full on his tawny head, the pale, delicate-featured patrician face, he stood and laughed back at them.

"I cry you mercy! While you bask in the fragrance of—of Oolong, I go out from Paradise to perdition."

"That is a new name for Rothlyn," mused Jimmie. "Never heard it before—Perdition."

"Hold on!" called Mr. O'Donnell. You know what Scott wrote:

"Twas Christmas trod the mightiest ale,
Twas Christmas told the merriest tale!"

"And I think Christmas should bring a good song with it, too. My dear," to Lady Iva, "before Sir Geoffrey goes, won't you sing the last you learned to please me? Ah, do now!"

"Without notes—here?"

"We'll be more than content"—a gallant bow—"with 'the music of your voice.'"

She dropped the sugar-tongs to bring her hands together.

"Ah! how shall I thank you for so flattering an assertion?"

"By singing, my dear!" he said.

"But you will never hear me in this huge hall."

Mr. O'Donnell rose to the occasion.

"Ah, but we shall see you!"

She rose and swept him an exaggerated and graceful curtsy.

"Tell us truly—when did you kiss the blarney-stone?"

He shook his white head ruefully.

"Faith, never, my dear, or I wouldn't be a battered old bachelor to-night."

And then when the laugh had subsided, and they all joined in importuning her, the Earl's daughter, still sitting in her huge, throne-like chair, lifted her fresh, sweet, strong young voice, and sang the song her old friend craved.

And at the door Sir Geoffrey Damyn paused and listened.

How plaintive it was, thrilling through the silence and the fireshine, that loyal Irish melody:

Oh, what was love made for, if 'tis not the same,
Through joy and through torment, through glory
and shame?

What, indeed?

A hesitant frown crossed the face of the man at the door.

He had loved Marguerite. He loved her to-day—not, when he was about to wrest her kingdom from her—more than he had ever

loved the beautiful, stately girl he had proposed to marry if he could.

Pshaw! he must stick to his resolution. There was "villainy somewhere." He must, he would drag it out into the daylight.

The song was done. He joined in the eager approval of the others—turned to go.

"Ah, there is the dressing bell," declared Lady Iva. "Can you not wait, Sir Geoffrey?"

With a bright, courteous smile on his lips, he wheeled around.

"I fear not. But I shall be back early—not later than half-past ten."

The others rose with laughter and bustle—prepared to disperse.

And Geoffrey Damyn went out into the cold and blowy Christmas night—out into the darkness and the drifting snow.

Behind him was light and laughter, and soft words and bright glances, and the gleam of jewels and the flutter of laces, and blithe badinage, and the sound of daintily-slipped feet—all those enchanting trifles which go so far toward making existence a thing of grace and beauty. From it all he went forth.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Dinner—long, formal, elegant—was over. The dear, delightful after-hour had come.

In the drawing-room was the drowsy hum of conversation, sounding like the "murmuring of innumerable bees."

The Earl was in capital spirits. He had a gay word for everyone. He was full of comical anecdotes, of infectious good-humour.

And to his wife, whenever they chanced to meet, he was remorsefully gentle, most tender and loving.

She was not looking well, he told himself. When the holidays were over, he would take her and Iva on the Continent for a few months. The change would do her good.

She wore her favourite gown of rich black velvet. A ruffle of rare old point edged the open corsage. The arms were bare to the shoulders. She had a knot of crimson roses at her breast.

The young, mignonette face betrayed to-night an almost deathly pallor. But very bright were the large grey eyes, and she smiled and talked with a charm, a fervour, which kept a little coterie around her chair.

Now and then Lionel Curzon looked at her in perplexed deliberation.

What had she meant by speaking so to Damyn? She must have been jesting. But no, it had not sounded like a jest. Well, it was none of his business, anyhow.

But he did so wish he could find an opportunity for a few words with Lady Iva! All the evening she had sedulously avoided him.

There was that idiot of a Richardson monopolising her now. He always had disliked military men! And this fellow had not an idea above the polish of his shoes and the set of his tie about him!

He was working himself into a state of vindictive resentment against the innocent captain, when his liege lady glanced up, chanced to behold his wrathful countenance.

What was he glowering over—her appalling heartlessness? As if she could ever be really unkind to him—the dear boy.

Unaware of her relenting reverie, the dear boy leaned against the piano—a very Apollo in evening-dress—moody-browed, though, as Hamlet.

He wished Damyn was in Japan. It was hard to have your rival under the same roof as your love. It gave him a decidedly unfair advantage. He had felt so sure of Iva for awhile. Yesterday, when that little episode of the mistletoe had occurred in the library, he had made up his mind to demand an

answer of Iva that evening. He felt confident it would be a blessed one for him.

Then the next day—to-day—he could give Sir Geoffrey an answer to his impertinent query as to by whom he was appointed Lady Iva's protector.

He could say, "She has given me the right!"

But, alas, he had adopted last evening a tone his high-spirited sweetheart had not liked, and there was "a little rift within the lute."

And the answer he had promised Sir Geoffrey it had not been in his power to give.

"Mr. Curzon!"

"I beg your pardon!"

He started from his soliloquy, turned to the speaker.

It was Aunt Clara, looking like a communistically-charactered individual, in her peony-red plush and garnets.

"Just look at Lillian!"

Her tone was ponderous as her personality. He turned his gaze on the Countess.

She was for the while alone. On a low, velvet divan she sat. Her hands were clasped on her knees. Her head was a little lifted. Her face had a certain weird loveliness. It was very white, save for a single burning spot on either soft cheek. Her lips were like threads of scarlet flame. Black and brilliant her great, sad eyes alone into vacancy.

Curzon gave his companion an interrogative glance.

"Something is wrong there. I believe that child at the lodge died of some contagious disease, and she had taken it from him. You never saw a woman in health look like that."

"She looks very lovely," Curzon replied, slowly.

"Yes, but it's fever. Unless—it couldn't be—"

She paused.

"Well?"

"It couldn't be the plum-pudding!"

He laughed aloud.

"Oh, no!"

Mrs. Vere looked relieved.

"I didn't think so. It was such a particularly good pudding. And the sauce—did you notice the sauce?"

But his thoughts had taken wing.

(Captain Richardson was leaving Lady Iva.)

"The flavouring was so delicious—exactly enough rose-water."

Even this verbal dig in the ribs passed unheard.

She unfolded her socialistic fan.

"In their sauces here they use such fine brandy—"

(At last Richardson had succeeded in tearing himself away.)

Back to the rosy-cheeked, corkscrew-curl old lady beside him came Curzon's roving glance.

What under the sun had she been talking about? Brandy? Surely she said something about brandy. Who had been indulging?

"Sad, yes—very!" he murmured, politely.

"Sir!"

"It is atrociously ungentlemanly for a fellow to so far forget himself!"

"Sir!"

"Eh?"

"You misunderstood me."

"Oh, no," cheerfully. "You were remarking Colonel Harrington gets rid of a good deal of brandy."

"No, sir," emphatically.

Innocent were the handsome brown eyes—very innocent the deferential air.

"I said—"

But she was prevented from repeating by the Earl, who just then came up to Curzon and carried him off to see a particularly fine print which they had been speaking of during dinner.

They passed the Countess as they crossed the room, and stopped a moment to chat.

Even the Earl was struck by her peculiar appearance, expression.

"Are you well, dear?"

"Oh, yes."

"Certain?"

She laughed, turning to young Curzon and flinging out her little hands with a pretty, deprecating gesture.

"Such a question! Don't I look well? Oh, please flatter me a tiny bit—say I do!"

The Earl's blue eyes looked all the flattery she could ask.

"Too well," promptly. "Fairly, what shall I say—fairly brilliant."

That delicious laugh of hers chimed out softly.

"Thank you! That is very nice indeed. In gratitude I shall not detain you."

And she swept them a graceful, lowly bow and went away from them down the drawing-room, her long train falling behind her, her arms and bosom contrasting marvellously with her sad-hued dress, her face irradiated by a beauty, an excitement almost startling.

In her heart was fear which was almost despair, with one wild possibility shudderingly coming, as shudderingly going.

It was open warfare now—war to the knife. And she knew that his, Sir Geoffrey Damyn's, powerful argument of fact would blunt and turn aside, as though it were but a child's toy sword, the solitary weapon—denial—which she could rear in her frail woman's hands.

The fact of Marguerite's marriage to Damyn could be very easily proven. Mrs. Stanford could declare the time the girl came to her house, the time she went away to visit a school friend; and the woman who had been their servant in that village on the seashore, could not explain where those six weeks were passed?—tell, too, how it was to her house the young lady came, one rainy April evening, and under her poor shelter Mrs. Damyn's child was born?

But to prove that she was Marguerite would be a harder task—not such an insurmountable one, though.

That tell-tale scar upon her palm! Was not the servant referred to in the room when the accident occurred? And did not Mrs. Stanford notice it on her return, and insist on balm-ing and healing it?

Then there was Mrs. Martin Simpson. If the proprietress of that small inn was appealed to, she would doubtless recall the locket she had found on the dead lady.

And who would consider it likely that the Countess of Silverdale would allow her sister to wear that portrait upon her heart? Her handwriting, too—Iva had remarked that. She also had seen her meet Reuben in the demense.

All might be plausibly put aside, all fought down, the whole accusation deliberately lied to, death, were it not for that mark—that zig-zag red line—which across her own fair hand seemed to scrawl:

"Defeat!"

Yes, they had all seen it, commiserated and commented on it when she had returned home—her father, her aunt, Lillian—and she had told them some flimsy story of a bottle of perfume which she had broken in her grasp.

But if the question as to identity were agitated, as it undoubtedly would be now, instantly would those who had seen the scar declare it had seared the palm of Marguerite, not Lillian. And then would not Harold remember how she had wailed over baby Willie, last night, and cried out:

"My own child!"

No—oh, no! the case was quite hopeless. Look where she would, she could see no ray of light. In a few days, at farthest, her reign would be over, her day gone.

There was one way out of it—only one. She grew cold at the mere thought of it.

Little they knew, or even vaguely dreamed—those charming women and noble men who filled her beautiful drawing-room, and talked of what an extremely fortunate man the Earl

of Silverdale was—little they suspected the shrinking, the cowardice, the tragedy in her heart.

The cowardice! Ah, no! Courage was master there—but a most reckless, most desperate courage.

And minute by minute it grew.

"Little mamma," cried Lady Iva, when they happened to be alone together for a moment, "I never saw you look half so lovely. You are actually bewildering!"

She laughed her own peculiarly pleasant laugh.

"And Harold said I was brilliant? Don't overwhelm me! I ought to say something polite in return. But you know how you scorn my praise. If only I were a heart-breaking young gallant now—"

And laughingly they parted.

Indeed, Lady Iva, all in pale, clinging, azure silk, her corn-gold hair shining, her cheeks just the tint of an apple-blossom in spring, her violet eyes laughing and proud and serene by turns, needed no words; so admiring were the glances given her, to tell her how fair she was—what a picture! what a poem!

Only one way out!

How it rang in my lady's ears! It would not be dispelled, silenced.

If she were to employ that means of escape, that solitary chance of security, of freedom from blame, from contempt, from the curse of the man she loved—that sole certainty of concealment—

Oh, she could not!

With all the force of her soul she tried to rout the vile suggestion.

More fiercely on her cheek burned that fervid danger signal. Her great dark eyes streamed light.

She must not let herself think. She must resist the temptation—banish it. If she could not strangle it, it would conquer her. So she chattered on to those around her, spoke of the coming season, of Sardou's latest masterpiece, of the ball given in town by the Austrian Envoy, of Hunt's Academy picture.

But never once, of course, of the little dead child at her gates, or the horrible purpose in her heart.

It would not be banished. She drove it away. Again it came.

Someone sang a soaring, hysterical Italian song. Through its rippling roulades she heard only the haunting whisper—over and over.

It woke to fresher life after a moment's forgetfulness—it stung like a snake.

One way out!

And then they would never know of that perilous plot of hers, those she loved, her father, Iva—more than all, Harold.

Damyn would be silenced effectually. All would be well.

But could she—dare she?

"You coward," she said savagely to herself, "you must!"

Ten!

It clanged out from the tower. A panic seized her.

He had said he would be home not later than half-past ten. What might he not resolve to say to the Earl to-night?

He was a very determined individual, this outraged husband of hers, for all his languid, easy ways.

There was no time to lose. What was the night doing? She went to one of the windows, looked out.

A splendid night for the accomplishment of her plan!—cold and clear, with a boisterous wind, which, now and then, whirled up the snow like spray. And, all, in the steel-dark eky, battalions of stars and a slow-sailing, pallid moon.

Just the one manner of escape—only one. Well, she would take it.

She turned, left the room unobserved, mounted the stairs.

Just then Curzon and the Earl came out of the library. The former noticed the childish, velvet-robed figure running lightly up the wide

stairway, but the Earl, interestedly explaining an artistic anachronism, did not see her.

Straight to her bedroom, to her wardrobe, she hurried. She took down a long cloak of Russian sable, flung it over her shoulders, drew the fur hood over her head.

Then, with a rapidity of motion born of the fear of quailing if she allowed herself to consider at all, she passed into her boudoir, to her cabinet, knelt down before it, pressed the spring of the drawer wherein lay her friend.

Her nervous clutch closed on it—she raised it out. In her bosom she hid it, the heavy, ugly thing.

She shook.

How cold it was—how icily cold—against her warm, pulsing flesh!

He would be on his way back. Haste!

She sprang up.

She drew her wrap tightly around her, went to the French window, which opened on the balcony and stair, passed out and down.

In the white, sharp, drifting night she paused a moment, irresolute.

Which way would he come?

Surely, this!

Five minutes more and she stood under a gigantic snow-laden oak, half-way down the main avenue.

She could see the far-away speck of flame which she knew was the light in the room of the lodge where her baby lay dead.

Leaning a little forward, her fingers grasping the brutal weapon, shivering, freezing, frantic to desperation, the Countess of Silverdale watched and waited.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

All the way to town Sir Geoffrey Damyn found himself repeating the words of the song Lady Iva had sung.

Could he be as generous as that? At the eleven-th hour give up his fixed and fierce decision?

Confound it, no! There must be no shirking now. It was the kind of thing a man of honour was bound to see through!

She had not been false that time in London. It was all the work of that infamous servant of his—the whole miserable affair—he could comprehend it thoroughly at last.

If that were all—if even after that, believing himself an unwedded wife, she had married Lord Silverdale, he would have had for her no word of blame.

But he knew there was some mystery at the back of the position she held.

It was Lillian Woodville who had become the Countess of Silverdale—heaven knows the papers were full to overflowing with accounts of it—Lillian, that was the name. And Marguerite had been chief bridesmaid. He recollected that too. He had read every word concerning the marriage—every line he could find about the celebration. But later Marguerite had died, as the papers also duly chronicled. Then why—how was Marguerite here?

That was the question which must be answered.

Deliriously interwoven with the cadence of Moore's sweet song, it beat in his brain as he galloped down the avenue.

As he passed the southern lodge he drew up his horse—bowed his head.

Without doubt it was his son who there lay lifeless—his boy whom he had never known. Her son, too! God of patience, how she must have suffered!

He swung himself off his horse. He opened the gates himself, went through and out upon the highway, then straight towards town.

He could hardly think of Marguerite—the Marguerite he had known—frank, uncalculating, laughterful, developing into such an adventures.

Adventures? that was a hard word, but what other could he use?

For Lord Silverdale's wife was his wife—

there was no doubt of that. And Silverdale had never married her.

Stop!

A possibility occurred to him which made him rein up suddenly.

Could it be that the Earl knew—was a party to the farce?

Immediately the idea was banished.

Impossible! He was too proud a man, too straightforward, too lofty of soul for that! Oh, what was love made for if 'tis not the same Through joy and through torments, through glory and shame.

Even to himself he did not attempt to deny his love for her. A new passion had usurped the place of her affection for him. But his was not the nature which barbers devotion, which gives so much fondness for so much passion. He had loved her wholly and unreservedly. So he loved her to-night.

And yet he was going to drag her down to worse than loss, to worse than loneliness, to shame and degradation.

Oh, what was love, for if 'tis not the same—

That ranting old rhyme! He wished he could exorcise it. Such rot!

But it thrilled him through for all that.

The roads were bad. Deep lay the snow. Now and then a pearly shower misted and swirled around him, but resolutely he kept his beast plodding on.

He passed comfortable farmhouses, lowly dwellings. In all were light and merry-making, and crackling fires and glad voices.

For it was Christmas night, and

Rich and poor felt love and blessing
From that gracious season fall,
Joy and plenty in the cottage,
Peace and feasting in the hall,
And the voices of the children
Ringing clear above it all.

And there ahead clustered a hundred points and glints and gleams—the lights of Rothlyn.

He spurred his horse on up the main street. Here he turned off down the lonely half-mile to the station.

A place of cosiness and mirth was the bare little railway station to-night. The agent and his family were having quite a jolly time of it.

Indeed

Many a one that night was merry,
Who had toiled through all the year.

Sir Geoffrey dismounted, and with some difficulty succeeded in tying his horse.

He went into the bare waiting room. The clerk presented an inquisitive face at the little wooden grating.

Who was the gentleman in the big fur coat and cap, who was stamping and shaking off the snow in so deliberate a fashion?

Damyn looked up; the man recognised him. One of the guests from the Castle!

Instantly he was alert and respectful.

What was he going to do now that he was here? Would his contemplated action be dishonourable? No; he surely had the right to establish his position—to prove why and how his wife lived in Silverdale Castle, ostensibly the bride of another man.

Oh, what was love made for if 'tis not the same?

Hang it all! he was sick of the eternal reiteration. Infernally true, though. Was this the way to show one's love for a woman—to madden her with publication of her shame?

"Message, sir?"

"Yes."

He walked to the window, took up a blank form, a pen, wrote his despatch.

He considered it a minute, tore it up.

The clerk waited patiently.

Then he wrote another, half pushed it under the grating.

I know that I love thee whatever though art.

With a muttered oath, Damyn jerked back the sheet.

The official stared at him. He took a couple of cigars out of his vest pocket, passed them through the brown bars.

"No, I won't send it. Second thoughts best, you know. Good-night!"

He buttoned up his coat, swung round and out of the station.

And the clerk, with a glance and grunt of astonishment, settled down to smoke the best cigar it had ever been his good fortune to obtain.

Back to the town, down the street, and off the road to the Castle galloped Sir Geoffrey Damyn.

He was a fool—a confounded, vacillating fool, he told himself. But for all that, he felt vaguely relieved that he had as yet taken no initiative steps.

What a grand night it was, all white and icy and bracing under the flooding moonlight! He must think it over calmly—find some less public, less ignominious method of discovering the whole truth.

He was at the lodge-gate now, through, riding up the avenue.

Suddenly he jerked his animal back on its haunches.

What was that standing there, not twenty feet away?

It could not be! And yet—

He was not mistaken. In the bright moonlight every feature was clear-cut as a cameo.

Yes, by Jupiter!

He dug his spurs in his horse's side. The brute bounded forward. Flinging the rein on his neck Damyn leaped off just before that dark, waiting figure.

He wheeled round.

The two were face to face—for the last time!

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Going—so soon?"

Unaccountably enough she was for the moment alone. And Lionel Curzon, standing before her, tall and handsome, making his adieux, thought that of all fair women Heaven had fashioned, this proud love of his was the sweetest and the fairest.

She was a trifle tired. She had been persistently gay all the evening, perhaps because there had been a bit of pain tagging at her heartstrings ever since that interview in the breakfast-room last night.

And because of her weariness the pretty, apple-blossom bloom had gone away from her cheek, leaving it, not pallid, but just the soft colourness of a white rose.

"Is it soon?"

"I think so," gently.

"It has been a long evening to me," he said, quietly.

"How very flattering."

And she laughed.

But his brown eyes held their sternness.

"I don't try to be complimentary to you. I tell you the truth."

She clasped her slim, milk-white hands on her silken lap.

"Ah!" she murmured, "how delightful to have a perfectly candid friend!"

Lionel bit his lip.

Was she laughing at him? The lifted violet eyes were wholly guileless.

"You know why the night seemed long and dreary!" he avowed, significantly.

A faint pink wave swept over her face.

"Long and dreary! How pleasantly you put it! And why," with a swift smile, gracious and radiant as a burst of summer sunshine—"why, if you found it so dull, didn't you come and talk to me?"

"So sweet, so questioning, the lovely, up-turned face!"

The poor fellow was fairly staggered.

"How could I? You had that end of a Richardson and that idiot of a Christie hanging around you all the evening."

"Cad," musingly, "and idiot! What very remarkable terms!"

Curzon crimsoned.

"Well, a shade strong, perhaps. But you must admit Randolph is about as brainless as they make them."

"Mr. Christie!" surprisedly.

"Yes."

"I thought you knew him?"

"I do," grimly.

"Oh, no—impossible!" with a great deal of animation. "He is a most entertaining conversationalist."

"Is he?" still more grimly.

Lady Iva flashed him a bewitching smile.

"There! I felt sure you did not know him, or you would have had no doubts of his ability to make hours pass pleasantly."

Lionel lost a little of his well-bred repose of manner.

"You should tell him of your admiration!" he declared.

"Oh, not for the world! Make him vain! Spoil his unconsciousness, his youthful artlessness—how can you suggest anything so dreadful?"

Was she serious?

The rose-red mouth was dimpling suspiciously at the corners.

"His simplicity, his sincerity, his childlike ways of looking at things are so refreshing!"

How aggravatingly in earnest she appeared!

"Why, just a short time ago he was telling me how sadly he was situated. My heart quite ached for him."

He retreated in amazement.

"Did you say your heart?"

She nodded.

"Who would have dreamed it?" he queried, slowly.

"What?"

"That you had a heart."

She laughed; but she blushed, too.

"Not had—have."

There was something in his brown eyes now which forced her own shining orbs to droop—something very loyal and passionate.

"How I wish," he whispered, "you would give it to me!"

A bold speech; but he who never was bold never was wise.

Valiantly, half-defiantly, she looked up at him, as, eager and silent, he stood before her.

She was not pale or tired now. Never did June roses boast a more velvety pink than that sweet face of hers.

"Ah, I need it—for awhile!"

He stooped his dark head.

"Only for awhile! Then, Iva," his voice trembling ever so little—"then perhaps you will—"

Softly and gaily she laughed as she rose.

"I will now!"

"Now, Iva!"

"Why not?" with a pretty, wondering smile. "I assure you I was very sorry for him!"

Lionel clinched his hands.

"For whom?"

"Mr. Christie!"

"Oh, hang Mr. Christie!"

"Hang him—poor Mr. Christie? What a monstrous suggestion! No, indeed, though he confided to me life was hardly worth living, because the ladies made it such a torture to him."

She was smiling undisguisedly now.

"He said it seemed to be his misfortune, for it certainly was not his fault, to inspire affection, which he could not return!"

Wrathful and disgusted though he was, Lionel relaxed into a smile.

"He told me, went on Iva, her beautiful eyes sparkling, her cheeks dimpling, her white teeth showing in irresistible enjoyment of the relation—"he told me such had ever been his lot. On beholding evidence of admiration in some susceptible maiden, he ever righteously endeavoured to crush, subdue it, at the risk of appearing unkind, but usually in vain. Just now a girl in Kerry and a widow in Dublin bewail his desertion. He laments his fascination; he was born to charm. He is cruel to be compassionate, he infers. And you wonder that I find him entertaining!"

Such a peal of laughter as the two broke into—such a ringing, merry, uncontrollable shout.

It brought a dozen clustering around them. "Tell us the joke," insisted Randolph, endeavouring to make his refractory, because inexperienced, eyeglass stick. "What is so funny? I'm shuah we should all appreciate it—shuah!"

Again Lionel laughed explosively. But Lady Iva turned to Mr. Christie with a smile which to him savoured of surrender. "Don't ask me," sweetly. "It won't bear repeating. It don't think really you would care to hear it."

And then these happy, ridiculously young people laughed out heartily and spontaneously once more.

Ten minutes passed. Then Lionel had dragged himself away, and was out in the crisp, cold, moonlit night, and walking rapidly down the avenue.

He stopped to light a cigar. As he did so a horse sped by him.

Riderless? He could hear the stirrups clanking. Anything wrong?

He walked quickly on.

How brightly the moon shone! It made quite a glare on the snow. Every frost-diamond was glittering in the brilliance.

Hark! He stood still.

A shot! Another! Or was it an echo of the first?

Every nerve, every muscle, grew tense.

He flung away his cigar, gathered his strength, ran fleetly, just as fast as his strong young legs would carry him down the avenue.

There, in the middle of the drive, what—who was that? That small, trailing-robed, far-cloaked figure?

He checked himself.

What had happened—what horrible tragedy?

He forced himself to go forward.

"Lady Silverdale!" he cried.

Slowly she turned.

Neither spoke.

Ghastly white she was, shaking. Her flashing fingers clutched a still-smoking revolver. And over there, just beyond, something long and heavy and dark and motionless lay terribly distinct upon the snow.

"Lady Silverdale!"

It was with an effort he called out again.

He could see her quite distinctly. Her hood of crimson-lined fur had slipped from her head. The snow around her was not whiter than her face. There was something vaguely terrible in the glittering brilliance of her eyes.

Her answer was a laugh—a shuddering, heart-sick, bitter laugh.

"I failed—I missed, did I not?" she cried.

And suddenly, before he could interpose, move a step, she threw up her right arm, the hand which held the revolver, and flung the weapon fiercely from her. It sped through the bare-branched trees, fell in the snow.

Instantly Lionel Curzon recognised the madness of the act.

Search for it now would be vain; but it assuredly would be found, and if it bore any distinguishing mark—any peculiarity by which its ownership could be traced—a vague, startling horror of the suspicions which might arise swept through his brain—staggered him. And her rash, mad speech—if any but he had chanced to hear it!

He sprang forward, caught her hand in his—her pretty, bare, cold, diamond-lit hand.

"Hush!" he cried, authoritatively. "Don't let anyone hear you speak so—ever. You did not miss your aim; look there!"

He dropped her hand, rushed toward the dark form prostrate on the snow.

For an instant she stood statue-like, fairly petrified. Then she followed him.

A queer scene, in truth. The magnificent curving avenue; on either side centuried oaks; the dazzling moonlight on dazzling snow; the three figures, one lying prone. Over him Lionel Curzon bent.

"Good heaven!" he cried.

There was no doubt, no mistake whatever. The slender, fur-coated figure, the chiseled, blonde-moustached, aristocratic face.

He swung round to the Countess.

"It is Damyn—Sir Geoffrey Damyn! And he is dead!"

She did not stir nor speak.

Lionel was dumbfounded. Then he remembered.

Why should she pretend amazement, dismay, when her only fear had been she had missed her aim.

He turned from her, dropped on his knees. He pulled open the great-coat, laid his ear upon the heart of the corpse.

No sign of life, no faintest throb or beat rewarded him.

He rose slowly.

His hands felt strangely warm and damp. He glanced at them. They were crimson, dripping. Hastily he rubbed them in his handkerchief.

"Come, your ladyship!"

He offered her his arm. Mechanically she laid her fingers upon it.

They turned—leaving that black and quiet thing upon the snow—walked together up the avenue.

She seemed in a sort of trance. She was neither disturbed nor excited.

An indifference stupid and profound, an actual torpor, had succeeded her passionate perturbation.

But her companion was thrilling fiercely with repulsion—condemnation. The discovery had shocked him unutterably.

Damyn dead! Damyn, who had been his rival, with whom he had quarrelled yesterday, to whom he had promised a reply to-day. And now he was dead—murdered!

By whom? Of that he would not—must not—think. What had driven her to such a desperate deed? he wondered.

He recalled the scene in the library at Mrs. Trendworth's a few nights ago. The Countess lying unconscious on the lounge, Sir Geoffrey bending over her, his eyes, with a great horror in them, fixed full upon her scarred palm! What recollection, what recognition, had he read there?

Before them rose the lighted windows of the castle. As with one accord, they paused. She slipped her hand from his sleeve.

Without a word or look she sped from him along the terrace, and up a little spidery iron staircase which led to the southern wing.

With a bewildered face, Curzon looked after her.

What was he to do? Had he, on his way home, come upon the body—merely that—he would immediately have raised an alarm. But to discover the murdered man, and with him—or at least near him—the Countess of Silverdale, smoking revolver in hand—ah, that was a different thing altogether!

To criminate, in the slightest way implicate her, was out of the question. There could be no doubt of her guilt—none whatever. That was no reason, though, he should put blood-hounds on her track.

What was the secret existing between her and Damyn? With what threat had he been terrifying her, this afternoon, when she had cried out so passionately:

"If you do, I will kill you!"

Oh, he could not solve the mystery, if mystery there was at the back of it. And he must not leave the poor fellow, who, so strong and bright and healthy, had left them a few hours ago, stiffening there in the snow.

How it did drift and swirl—the snow.

In little gusts and eddies the wind swept it up around him.

A man came tearing around the house. He slackened his rapid pace as he beheld the young fellow standing stock-still in the moonlight.

"Bless my soul, sir!" breathlessly, and touching his hat as he spoke. "We got a scare just now, me and Tom, when Sunset

came a-gallop' in. Did he act vicious, Sir Geoffrey?"

Lionel turned—confronted him.

The groom fell back.

"Mr. Curzon!"

"Yes. Sir Geoffrey lies half-way down the avenue—dead!"

"Dead, sir?"

The man leaped forward.

"Then he was thrown arter all!"

"Go and get some of the servants together, and some sort of a stretcher!" he commanded, without answering the question.

He hurried forward, and up the ermine-covered steps.

He lifted the heavy knocker, sent his summons resounding through the Castle. A footman opened the door.

"I must see the Earl here—at once!"

Lionel cried, pushing by him. "I—"

He stopped short.

For here was Lord Silverdale himself—all the others, too, for the matter of that. Not all. He could not see the Countess. But the vast hall was half filled with gay, laughing courtly people, in the magpie solemnity of masculine full-dress, and the lustrous sheen of feminine attire.

"Just back in time, dear boy! Glad you changed your mind. We are all going down to the servants' hall. They have their dance to-night, you know. Come along!"

How unconscious he was—they were! Where was she? Where was the Countess?

Of the many present, only one read disaster in his face. Lady Iva alone noticed how its splendid dark beauty had blanched; how full of hesitation—horror, were his bold, brown eyes.

Swiftly, straightly, she passed through them all. So direct her movement, speech ceased.

Half curiously, the others looked after her. She went straight up to where her lover stood, lifted her clear, brave eyes to his.

"What is wrong? Something has happened—what?"

Upon the thoughtless throng a prescient silence fell.

"Eh? What's that?" cried the Earl, joining them. "Anything out of the way, Curzon?"

Every eye was fixed on him.

"Yes. Sir Geoffrey Damyn is dead!"

"Dead!"

A murmur like the rustling of dry leaves went through the hall as they incredulously repeated the word.

Dead! Why he had been with them such a short time ago, strong and well. He had laughed back at them standing in the doorway there, where Lionel stood now. Dead! Oh, it was impossible!

"Oh, look here, Curzon, don't you know!" protested his lordship. "That's a beastly poor joke. You can't—"

And all the time the midnight was gleaming on a staring face; all the time the furies of snow drifting over, stinging it.

The young fellow strode forward. He lifted his hand with an imperious gesture. There was that in his wild glance which carried conviction. He spoke clearly, ringingly:

"I tell you Sir Geoffrey Damyn is dead. He lies out there on the avenue with a bullet in his brain!"

For one moment silence, intense, thunder-struck. Then they all broke out talking at once.

Coming suddenly this way, in the midst of their merriment, their Christmas revelry, the news thrilled to the heart the most blasé, most callous of them.

Commotion reigned; a hundred exclamations of dismay, regret, conjecture, sprang to their lips. They pressed around Lionel for particulars, explanations.

The Earl laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Lionel, my boy, listen to me. Is it suicide?"

He turned impulsively to reply. His lips paled. What was he about to say? murder? No, he must not be the first to put on foot inquiry which might lead to her.

Lord Silverdale observed his confused silence, his sudden hesitant self-repression. They all did.

"That I did not wait to determine. There are the servants with a stretcher. Who will come?"

Half a dozen started forward, hastily donned wrappings.

They went out; the great doors clanged behind them. Those remaining did not think of retiring—of even leaving the hall. They clustered together around the blazing hearth, and talked of the tragedy, of the victim, of the possible cause of the affair, of their own astonishment and dismay.

It was awful to consider that in the midst of life they were in death. Aunt Clara assured them, with an originality which was quite refreshing. Such a perfect gentleman! Had he any near relatives living? It was not long since he had come into his baronetcy, was it? How oddly he had insisted on going into town this evening, though the Earl had tried to dissuade him. Was it suicide, they wondered, or could it really be anything worse?

And so they chattered on in subdued, well-bred fashion—saw how sorry they were, how shocked! And that handsome Mr. Curzon—how pale, how perplexed, really terror-stricken he had looked!

All the time the firelight flickered on their satins and silks, glowed in their velvets, played hide-and-seek in their rare old laces, flashed in their jewels, glittered over their ringed, patrician hands, fluttered their fair faces.

And all the time, too, while they spoke of their pity, their amazement, their nervousness and bewilderment, all the time there was a certain warmth at their hearts, a certain pleasurable pulsation.

They would not have killed him—have had him killed, rather—for the whole world. Neither, for the matter of that, would they have wilfully assassinated a kitten or a mouse.

But the excitement of such a sudden death, whether murder or suicide, was something new, something thrilling.

Did not the Roman women crave some such ferocious stimulus when they turned their thumbs downward on the questioning glance of the gladiator?

Twelve!

Out pealed the measured strokes.

"Where is Lady Iva?"

It was Mrs. Shirley, a bewitching bride, who had propounded the question.

Ah, here she was now, coming down the stairs!

"I went up to tell mamma," she said. "She was lying down, still dressed, but asleep, so I did not like to awaken her."

She did not join the others.

On the lowest step of the staircase she sank wearily. What awful things were always happening! She had just made up her mind it was such a good world, such a bright, cheery, pleasant world! And here, within the last four-and-twenty hours, were two she had known and daily met—dead!

How could they sit there discussing it so zestfully. She felt fairly stunned, chilled.

"Pooh Geoff!" ejaculated a voice beside her. "Doosid unpleasant thing to happen a man—especially on such an extremely nawsy night."

She glanced up at Mr. Randolph Christie. Reddish as to skin, as to hair, as to moustache was that young gentleman, very gorgeous as to attire.

"Death can hardly be considered delightful any night," she answered, coldly.

She wished he would go away. He did not

mean to be flippant, of course, but it was not in his nature to be anything else.

Mr. Christie stared at her.

Suddenly he recollected he could not see without his eye-glass, and hastily adjusted that convenient article. It seemed to prove an aid to his obtuse perception, if not to his sight, for quite startlingly and comprehensively he laughed out.

"Yes—aw, yes, of coahs! Quite so. Now I wonder if it was hea'lt disease? I do, don't you know?"

She did not answer.

Randolph struck an attitude and stroked his moustache with a tenderness most commendable, considering its delicacy and extreme youth.

"I knew a case of hea'lt disease lawat yeah—so sad! A young lady—a chawming young lady—was so awfully ill with it—went eve'whicah for relief—caused by disappointment of some sawt—some secret sorrow, you know. We had been good friends—no moah—at least, my interest was—aw—meahly cousinly. I had nevah said a syllable, I assuah you, which could have led her to think that my affections were—aw—bestowed upon her. So—h I went away—the only thing left a fellah of bonah to do, don't you know—"

"She died, of course?" quietly put in Lady Iva.

"Aw—no."

"No!" amazedly.

"No. You see she felt so—so piqued, you know, she married the first man who—"

"The first man, after all. And Love was her physician! They were happy ever after, I suppose. How charmingly your little idyl ends!"

In her shimmering azure draperies she rose up, stately and beautiful, flashed him a sweet, provoking smile, and moved away.

"Hark!" someone cried.

Without was the heavy, snow-muffled tread of men's feet.

Jimmie Talbot went quickly forward, threw the huge doors wide.

In swept a blast of wind which set the lights dancing—an icy air and a skurry of snow.

Under the lofty portals, slowly and reverently entered a dozen men, bearing in their midst a stretcher, on which lay an appallingly quiet figure.

Across the threshold—over the very spot where he had so lately stood and jested—they carried him in. In the centre of the great hall they laid him down.

A painful silence fell upon all. They burned with curiosity, yet shrank from speech, as though it were sacrilege in the presence of that which, through the shawl cast over it, was so grimly, so starkly outlined.

"Is it suicide?" questioned Mr. O'Donnell. The rest listened, with tense eagerness.

The men were dashing off the powdery snow which clung to them, removing their coats.

The Earl answered. His fair, Saxon, brown-bearded face looked pale and fierce.

"No!" he cried—"It is murder!"

And my lady heard.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2061. Each number can be obtained through all Newsagents.)

DRINKER: "Oh, let up a little! There are some things to be said in favour of drinking." Abstainer: "What are they?" "Drunkard's luck, for instance. I fell downstairs once when I was 'under the influence,' and wasn't hurt a bit. If I had been sober I would have been killed." "You are mistaken, my friend. If you had been sober, you wouldn't have fallen down stairs."

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MADE MATTERS WORSE.—A devoted couple got married a little time ago and took up their abode in a dainty villa in a suburban quarter. Everything in the house was of the latest and most tasteful kind, and the appearance of the place gave unmixed satisfaction. But one evening, when the husband returned from business, he found to his disgust that a water pipe had burst. The rooms were flooded, and the carpets, which were the husband's especial pride, were in danger of being spoiled. "Well, well," said he, impatiently, to his wife, "why on earth didn't you hammer the pipe up? Here, give me a hammer and I'll do it in a twinkling!" He got the hammer and pounded away at a pipe down in the cellar. When he had finished he paused to examine the result of his labour; then, to his complete chagrin, he heard the sweetly chiding voice of his wife at the top of the stairs: "Howard," said she, "I am sorry to say the gas has gone out!"

NECESSITY, NOT GALLANTRY.—Necessity originally brought about the presence of ladies at dinner. Servers and henchmen were superseded by lady carvers, who worked at a side table. In Elizabethan times, at private dinners, it became usual to place the principal dishes at the upper end of the table above the salt, so that the chief guests could see them and secure choice helpings. We have something of this kind now in the habit which prevails at restaurants of first showing the game, poultry, etc., to the diners before carving. The place which came to the fair sex from necessity was soon claimed by them as their right, and they passed from the menial position of carver to the occupiers of the principal seat. The lady had helpers who deemed it an honour to serve her in their turn. In this duty of semi-professional carver lies one of the first causes of the paper frills for legs of mutton, etc., for it was used in every case where the operator had to grasp some tangible part of the point with the left hand. In 1653 a grand dame suggested that it would appear "more comely and decent to use a fork"—this in spite of existing prejudices. It was at this time, too, that travellers from Holland introduced into England the fashion of seating men and women alternately, the adoption of which put an end to lady carvers.

THINGS THAT ARE WORTH KNOWING.—A man should weigh twenty-six pounds for every foot of his height.

In mining accidents one death in four is caused by afterdamp.

One-third of the people who go mad recover their senses.

The hair of the head grows faster in summer than in winter.

Oxen and sheep fatten better in company than when left alone.

Forty-eight kinds of house-fly have been classified by naturalists.

The most valuable by-product produced on the farm is the skim milk.

The eight muscles of the human jaw exert a force of about five hundred pounds.

Whitewash made of quicklime and ashes will destroy moss on tiles.

The various countries of the world use thirty-four hundred different kinds of postage stamps.

The eel has two separate hearts. One beats sixty, the other one hundred and sixty times a minute.

Some of the insurance companies of Paris refuse to insure people who dye their hair.

The standard of height in the British army is greater than in any other army in the world.

More steel is used in the manufacture of pins than in all the sword and gun factories in the world.

If you have a leaky boot, it is sure to be on the foot that gets in the mud.

Scientists say that the potato rot comes once in ten years—every decayed as it were.

Many a plain, unattractive girl gets a husband on account of her pa value.

"What is ease?" asks a philosopher. Ease is a thousand pounds and a hundred pounds job.

EGGS BELONGING TO THE WIFE.—An American judge has decided that the money received from the eggs laid by the hens on the farm belongs to the wife. If a person looked at it in this light there are a few farmers about whom it might be said that man is supported by his wife; even the groceries, his overalls, and tobacco are bought by his wife's money and thrift. Laying all points of law aside, however, when the farm is mortgaged or there are other debts, we believe the money received from the sale of eggs should partly go toward keeping the family; any way, but when a man is all out of debt we should say give the wife and daughters every cent of the money received from that source. They have probably earned that much and a lot more with it through what work they do outdoors in the gardens and with the poultry. We mean give it to them to spend for just what they feel like spending it for, and not to use in buying sugar, rice, or some other family necessity.

GOVERNMENT WHITEWASH.—The government recipe for whitewash, which is used on lighthouses and other Government buildings where whitewash is required, is said to be the best formula there is. It is as follows:—Put two pailfuls of boiling water in a barrel and add one-half bushel of well burned, fresh quicklime. Put in quickly one peck of common salt dissolved in hot water and cover the barrel tightly to keep in the steam while

the lime is slacking. When the violent bubbling is over, stir until well mixed together, and, if necessary, add more boiling water, so as to have the mass like thick cream. Strain through a sieve or coarse cloth. Make a thin starch of three pounds of rice flour and one pound of strong glue, having first soaked the glue in cold water, and to the latter mixture add two pounds of whiting. Add this to the limewash and also sufficient hot water to dilute to the proper consistency. Keep hot while applying. It will require about six quarts of the mixture to one hundred square feet of surface, and it may be made any colour desired.

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Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

The Editor wishes all his readers a Merry Christmas and a Bright and Happy New Year.

M. H. L.—Salisbury Cathedral is 403 feet high.

L. McJ.—France sold Louisiana to the United States for £5,000,000.

D. C.—Seventeen-year-old girls average between 75 and 80 pounds in weight, with a height of 5 feet or 5 feet 1 inch.

M. A. H. (Norwich).—All the numbers of that excellent story "A Golden Hope" are in print, and will be sent on receipt of one shilling and sixpence in stamps.

AN UNHAPPY ONE.—You can only try to cure your mother of her unfortunate habits by reasoning with her and refusing to contribute unless she lives within the family's means.

R. N.—Faustulus was the name of the shepherd who, in the old Roman legend, found Romulus and Remus getting suckled by the she-wolf. He took both the children to his home and brought them up.

WEARY MOTHER.—A labour-saving soap is thus made:—Take two pounds of sal soda, two pounds of yellow bar soap, and ten quarts of water. Cut the soap in thin slices, and boil together two hours. Strain, and it will be fit for use. Put the clothes in soak the night before you wash, and to every pail of water in which you boil them, add a pound of soap. They will need little or no rubbing. Carefully and thoroughly rinse them out, and they will be found, when dry, clean and white.

LOTTIE F.—Simply that he intends to break off the relation between you, either because he is tired of it, or because there is some obstacle—perhaps a wife, perhaps the opposition of parents, inability to support a family, or a doubt if you could make him happy. To write to him would be a useless sacrifice of pride. He might feel called upon to reply, but he evidently does not wish to keep up any connection with you. Make up your mind to this, and dismiss him from your thoughts as soon as you can.

ANNA.—There is a marked distinction between "strategy" and "tactics." Strategy has been called the art of planning a battle or a campaign, the "art of making war on the map," the art of rightly directing masses of troops so that they may arrive simultaneously at strategic points, so as to be ready to effectively strike the enemy; while tactics consist in the "employment and manœuvring of troops in the presence of, or in contact with, the enemy." Thus tactics are subsidiary to strategy. Strategy has a place in the absence of the enemy, while tactics have not. Strategy merges into tactics when the enemy comes within striking distance, and the latter have sometimes been called the strategy of the battlefield. From the earliest days of warfare strategy has been recognised as an important part of military science; to-day its rules are similar to those in the time of Caesar. Tactics is an art that varies with the spread of civilisation. Most great inventions so bear upon the armament, equipment, and conveyance of troops that the tactics of armies have to be frequently remodelled in consequence. Naval strategy is defined as "the science of combining and employing fleets or single ships at sea or against an enemy's coast," while naval tactics is "the art of manœuvring ships and fleets for the purposes of battle."

M. M.—The nicotine can be taken out of a meerschaum pipe, so that it can be again coloured, by boiling it in alcohol.

HEIR.—In the event of the death of the Prince of Wales, his eldest son would be first in the order of succession.

MARTIN.—No charge is made for answering queries in this column, it being a source of pleasure to me to thus oblige my readers to the best of my ability.

C. G. W.—The first play performed in the United States, America, was on September 5, 1752, at Williamsburgh, Virginia. It was "The Merchant of Venice," and the evening's entertainment closed with "Letha," written by Garrick.

LITTLE DOT.—It is permissible for the ladies to attend the theatre without the escort of a gentleman, but I do not think that it is a good thing to do so very frequently. Musical instruction can be had at very low rates in London. Piano-playing is taught very acceptably by women teachers.

LEDA.—Hong is the Chinese name for foreign factory or mercantile establishment. The word means a row or series, and is applied to warehouses because they consist of a succession of rooms. The factories in Canton are built in this manner, and each block is called by the natives a hong.

MUCH PUZZLED.—To cure rabbit skins, lay the skin on a smooth board, the fur side uppermost, and fasten it down with tacks. Wash it once, first with a solution of salt; then dissolve two and a half ounces of alum in one pint of warm water, and with a sponge dipped in this solution moisten the surface all over. Repeat this now and then for three days; when the skin is quite dry, take out the tacks, and rolling it loosely the long way, the hair inside, draw it quickly backward and forward through a large smooth ring, until it is quite soft; then roll it in the contrary way of the skin, and repeat the operation.

LADYBIRD is a young girl who lives with her widowed father, and took pride in him and in keeping the house neat and pretty until lately, when a shadow has fallen on her home in the shape of a woman with familiar, bold ways that are not like a lady's, who comes to the house to see her father, both when the daughter is at home and when she is away. People have talked to the girl of this woman and her father in a way that hurt her very much. She does not know what to do. Her father never speaks to her about the woman, and she shrinks from telling him how bitterly she dislikes to have her come to the house. Have you not some elderly friend—man or woman—some old friend of the family, to whom you could go for advice? Such a friend might properly undertake to talk to your father, and tell him of the neighbourhood gossip, and that he is showing very little fatherly regard for his daughter in subjecting her to such companionship.

MARGARON.—A person born in March is said to be strong-willed and imperious, will succeed, but will have enemies, and find it difficult to retain love and friendship. So says the "horoscope," but I do not at all guarantee that oracle. A person born on the 1st of March leap year celebrates his birthday on the 2nd of March each year except leap year. The anniversary falls just one year from the day of birth. If born on the 29th of February, the anniversary falls on the 1st of March. Every single man is a bachelor—that phrase meaning only an unmarried man. He is an old bachelor at fifty; a woman is an old maid at thirty-five. As to endowment societies, if honestly conducted, they are a help to business men or their families. If you are only thirty you need not despair of being able to fall in love. It is something that comes to all, soon or late, unless to some individual too selfish to love anybody but himself, or too deeply absorbed in intellectual pursuits, like Sir Isaac Newton and a few others.

E. W. J.—Cain is said to have married a native of the land of Nod, situated, it is presumed, to the east of the Garden of Eden, where he had taken up his abode after murdering his brother. The name of this woman is not mentioned in Holy Writ.

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